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Lie Down With The Lamb and Other Stories

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"LIE DOWN WITH THE LAMB"

AND OTHER STORIES

being

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by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

> It is only amidst difficulties and struggles that the moral part of man's nature avouches itself . . .
> August Wilhelm Von Schlegel

The following group of short stories, presented as a creative writing thesis, is arranged in a purposeful order. In each of the ten stories the main character meets some sort of crisis in which he faces failure or frustrating circumstances. These failures are from two sources: they come about (1) through character weakness, or (2) because of outside factors. In either case the story is also concerned with whether the character reacts negatively or positively, according to his particular weakness or strength of character.

The first four stories involve characters who fail through an inherent flaw; the six following stories treat themes involving characters who are faced with frustrations having their primary basis in events outside themselves and over which they have little control. In general the two main divisions are also arranged from the weaker to the stronger characters according to the reaction with which they meet their problems. Thus we see the character in the first story, Seton, meeting his problem in as negative a way, probably, as possible. He hangs himself. In the last story, the title piece, Ford Raines establishes complete control over his needs and environment and is able to find what is for him complete

peace.

The aims of the author can probably be most easily emphasized by first discussing the stories separately within the framework of the main divisions.

In the first story of the first division, "In the Tree," the problems that Seton has in adjusting to life come from within himself. We know of no particular event that has caused him to be as he is. He is perhaps a little dull-minded, but his is more a problem of lack of insight than lack of intelligence. He ditched out of school in search of impulsive fun, and at thirty is still trying the same tactics. He is finally dissatisfied; he is bored. But he sees that his friends are also bored with their workaday lives. His last impulse for action may be thought of as an effort to relieve the monotony of their lives--but more particularly it relieves the monotony of his own.

Opie and Tippy in the second story are much alike. They drift along and events seem to happen to them rather than because of them. In this light we see Tippy not really understanding the source of her pregnancy and Opie marrying Tippy because she happens to have money he needs. The one attempt Opie makes to solve his problems--opening a joint--doesn't change him or his fortunes. Since he was not strong enough either to rid himself of Tippy or to leave her after he shot her in the foot, Opie just drifts along with her.

Tippy listens to soap operas to escape, and Opie is a drunk who is an object of ridicule even to small boys.

The third story, "The Bed," is a more intensive treatment of the theme of lack of control over environment and existence. The single possession Jackson had to begin with, his ornate brass bed, he still has at the end. It symbolizes the poverty he cannot escape and the lack of any change in his sad, gray life.

Jackson's weakness is that he has no direction from within; like Opie, things just happen to him. When his father dies and his mother leaves, he makes no attempt to do anything to help himself. Victor takes him in and saves him from having to take any decisive action. Jackson doesn't look for an opportunity and then set about to seduce Victor's daughter--the opportunity is given him and the affair just happens without Jackson's apparent direction. When she becomes pregnant, it is Victor who decides they will marry. Jackson's reaction is that of submission, and they move back to the impoverished house where he was born--it is the only thing he knows.

"New Gravel Drive" is the last story of the division treating characters who fail through inherent weakness. When Tom and Jake's plot to gravel the bosses' drive and win his favor ends in disaster, it is because of their own ineptness. But their reaction isn't defeat; they know of another job. The work may be harder, but the pay is better.

Theirs is a positive reaction. Of course it is not the strongest reaction they might have had; Tom and Jake could have resolutely stayed to face the consequences. But they are not sterling in their strengths to start with, or they would not have made a fiasco of things. In the same way the first three stories show characters reacting weakly when faced with their particular crises. They must; they caused the crises through their own debility. An untenable reversal of character would be necessary for them to make any other reaction.

The characters of the last division are more "normal" types. In these six stories the characters have been faced with a crisis or a need for action through some factor outside themselves; again the stories are arranged with those showing a negative reaction first.

In this conjunction the first two stories are much alike. "The Afternoon of Professor Barcari" involves a boy while "State Fair Revue" has a married man as its protagonist, but they both react to their problems by trying to escape through fantasy. Petey in the former story is given a beating by his father, who in general lacks understanding and is a stern disciplinarian. Petey's mother, who usually babies him and stands up for him, now refuses to be his crutch. Petey runs away and comforts himself in a fantasy which takes two directions. In the first, Professor Barcari is essentially the

father image Petey desires; he understands and smiles upon his young assistant. The amazing Barcari takes the boy flying with him and compliments him on his performance.

The second fantasy betrays Petey's feeling that sexual love is an opposition to mother-love. It is actually as a punishment to his mother that he creates a half-clad girl who makes advances--which he decides to accept as long as his mother isn't showing concern about him.

"State Fair Revue" is a static story in that the protagonist remains in a particular state throughout--unhappy and finding comfort in his particular brand of fantasy. The story includes enough to reveal to the reader the causes of which this state are the consequence.[1] The cause is simple, in Lex's mind: he lost the girl who loved him and could have made him happy. The coincidences that caused him to lose Betty in the crowd are in fact the causes of his present state, but it is more complex than he sees. What the loss actually did was allow him to persist in his delusions and romanticize his affair with her. Had it gone any further, Betty would have forced him to be realistic by scorning his romanticizing and proposal of marriage. As it is, he is still immaturely demanding in his present marriage because he has a touchstone of imagined perfection with which to compare his present state.

The third story in this division, "Reflections in the Sky," has a plot easily recognizable in its relation to the

over-all theme. Ferd Meuller is unhappy in a situation which he knows is unsatisfactory. He hopes the discovery of oil on his land will bring an easy and painless way to solve his family and personal problems. But help from an outside source fails to materialize, and it is from within himself that he must find a solution if a solution is to be found. But stolid Ferd is still Ferd; he doesn't have the courage or imagination to make the change. We can imagine the continued gray thread of his life from that point.

In the last three stories we begin to move into the study of characters with more strength in their reaction to failure. The characters are very different: an older woman, a young man, and a middle-aged man. In the same way their crises are very different. What is similar is the way the protagonist in each case meets his crisis with courage in order to answer his need for a controlled and hopeful life. In all three the positive reaction comes from an inner strength that supplies both a course of action and the moral courage to carry it out.

In "Love Thy Neighbor" the important action is internal. Carrie's struggle for control is the theme and the largest part of the plot. The story implies that she is originally a Scotswoman, probably somewhat genteel. She consciously sets out to define values and set up discipline over her life, emotions, and passions. This is reinforced when she realizes

the disaster which an affair with her neighbor might have caused.

She gathers her life into close serenity by stressing graciousness and positive values; she is strict in her control of herself and unselfish and helpful to others. The crisis comes when, in carrying out those aims, she becomes involved in a fight with a neighbor woman. The wrangle is the very antithesis of what has been her aims, and it breaks her. But she picks up the pieces of her carefully-wrought shell and continues as she was before. She is convinced of the value and need of the kind of existence she has mapped, and this proves it to us.

"Young Men Dream" develops the theme in a more external plot. Bill goes into debt gambling on the success of an oil well location picked by dubious methods. He is almost afraid to articulate his needs, but we know success will make him rich and give him back status he has lost as a "black sheep" of his family. Failure will leave him in debt, of course, but more important than his financial state is how failure will leave him as a person. What the ending says is, "There is always hope." The crisis is over--he can forget about it. First things first, he eats his first good meal in days and shaves off his four-day stubble. Already he feels better . . .

The last story has purposely been chosen as the title

piece. Here we have the lives of two brothers, Ford and Larry; in a way they both fit the theme. Ford is somewhat like Carrie in that he realizes the answer for him after his failure is complete control over his existence. A difference is that his failure brought on his decision whereas Carrie had only to re-affirm hers. His type of control may be regarded as more eccentric because it is more complete. At the same time it is more satisfying because it is so complete and because it seems more natural to him. Ford has the inclination to become a recluse within him all the time, revealed in his attitude toward Larry's scramble for money in an econocentric society. Ford regards power and possessions as unimportant from the beginning of the story told in flashback. He would like to help people, but he is frustrated in this; he is an inventor, but his inventions are scoffed at or stolen. This latter event precipitates his failure in the business world. He throws it all over and "lies down with the lamb."

The sub-plot of Larry's rise and end is an anti-theme which in itself validates the theme of Ford's story and gives credence to his belief and later action. Seen through Ford, it gives the reader an illustrated basis for the "rightness" of Ford's reaction. Larry's very success brought about his failure, or a negative reaction in the light of our theme. Ford saw him "make himself harder in order to compete." Larry does "lose his <u>self</u>" in the frantic chase, and finally loses

himself literally. The lion in him was dominant and he refused to find peace.

And the search for peace is what the story--and the whole collection, for that matter--is about. The title, of course, comes from "and the lion shall lie down with the lamb," symbolizing the idyllic sought-for peace. How poorly or how well the characters succeeded is inherently tied up in their struggles against their various failures. The whole is intended to lead up to the last story where the man dominates; there is a spirit in him that will find a way. This is meant to be the culminating point, but the title is intended to be symbolic. Ford's answering way of lying with the lamb is only Ford's answer and is not the right one for Carrie or Bill or any of the others. Although the right answer in each case would correctly have to be "natural" to that particular character, the author is not proposing that the primitivistic, natural state of man, as Ford seems to espouse, is the ideal. It is right for Ford. The poor diet and lack of education and filth of the earlier characters are certainly not proposed as quaint or superior.

On that subject, a reader might be disturbed at the preoccupation with atypical types and the futile hoplessness of all the characters in the first division. It is true that it may be populated with a more-than-average number of weak-minded and weak-moraled lives. However, it is meaningful to

treat characters such as these for the purposes of the overall theme. In this lower end of human action and reaction the characters must remain in character when they bring futility and hopelessness to themselves. In contrast to the characters of the last stories who show control and purpose, these characters as a group lack any control over themselves, their environment, or the events that happen to them. They must be of a type to whom such action would be typical; they are isolated islands of impotence and purposelessness. "It is obvious that any kind of deviation, whether physical or psychological, naturally tends to increase this sense of isolation,"[2] answers Oliver Evans in defending Carson McCullers' use of characters far more grotesque than any found in this collection. But the point is the same: the weakminded, foolish and atypical types in their very beings may exemplify their lack of grasp on surrounding influences and environment.

In addition, a story which aims to point up human values sometimes gains the sharpest reaction from the reader by forcing sympathy and repugnance toward sick and unnatural characters. This ambivalence of reader reaction is one of the aims of these stories and will be dealt with more thoroughly in a later discussion of characterization.

The same sort of sharp impact on the reader against the distasteful or unsatisfactory is intended in the overt use of a "failure" theme. Impressions reinforced through the fail-

ure and the morbidity used here should be deeper and more lasting than if continued successes were portrayed as the crucial element of character change or lack of change. For support of the validity of this statement one might refer to Von Schlegel or to Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren defining the movement of a short story. The middle part of the story, or complication, they say, presents the "increased difficulty" encountered by a character as he moves toward stability. "If . . . a character moves easily toward his triumph or ruin, there is no story. The story inheres in the resistance encountered and overcome or not overcome . . ."[3] In overcoming or not overcoming their difficulties the characters in the following stories reveal themselves and the central theme of the stories.

The validity of this type of development is also pointed out by Simon Lesser, who applies the tenets of psychology in judging the effectiveness of fiction. He says that a conflict is at the heart of every story that is effective. In a broad sense the struggle is the struggle of impulse against inhibition. When his "inhibitions" are defined as meaning either external impediments or internal impediments to the impulse (which he allows[4]), he is defining what these stories aim for: defining human impulses as they appear when faced with impediments or difficulties.

In the discussion of what these stories are about,

perhaps we have arrived at the point where plot needs to be mentioned. In the traditional sense plot is lacking here, but it is almost traditional in the contemporary short story not to have plot--Ernest Hemingway, Eudora Welty, William Carlos Williams, William Faulkner, William Saroyan and a dozen others of today's best writers attest to it. Stories with high points of drama and adventure are perhaps best left to the pulp magazines, TV westerns, and children's series. For one thing, they are usually impossibly contrived. For another, high points of external suspense and drama are not typical of life. And for a third reason, a vast struggle often de-personalizes the characters; we get a good yarn but nothing else.

Strong plots can be valuable; a character might expose himself more sharply in a great conflict. But, as René Wellek and Austin Warren say in deprecating the importance of plot in fiction, "There are few works of art which are not ridiculous or meaningless in synopsis."[5] The modern writer Sean O'Faolain adds:

> I think if we examine some of the best stories of modern times in order to distinguish the essential and more valuable elements from the accidental and less valuable elements, we will find that the least essential element of all is the actual story or anecdote on which the tale rests.[6]

What, then, is left? If we could be as close to life as possible, we would copy the process in our own lives where-

by meaning emerges from experience. We are after a sense of life with the significance of it exposed. In revealing this the actual incident is only the trigger which leads up to the effect--its effect on a character who is one of the common human race. What is important in a short story, says O'Faolain, is "the instrument of human nature--so various, so complex, so contradictory, so subtle, so amusing and so unexpected."[7] In most modern stories the reader expects and demands a sense of communicated personality. James R. Frakes suggests that "in part owing to the particular modern preoccupation with self reflected . . . more recently in depth psychology and a school of philosophy known as existentialism."[8]

The answer, then, to "What is left if there is no plot?" is the development of character in a meaningful way. Brooks and Warren summarize for us:

> In the end the central logic we are concerned with is the logic of human motivation. How do human needs work themselves out? Plot, then, is character in action.[9]

Since revelation of character is so important, the methods of character development in these stories should be mentioned. All these stories, with the exception of the seventh and eighth (which were originally shaped by an idea of character), had their basis in fragmentary anecdotes. These anecdotes, however, were of the type that were not meaningful

except as they forced one question: "What sort of person would be involved in this incident in just this way?" This shaped an idea of character with his own particular logic of motivation; the actual story came from the character, and most bear no resemblance to the original anecdote.

Each character was then shaped and made to act so as to have his particular moment which said something about the stream of human existence and experience. "What is character but the determination of incident?" asks Henry James. "What is incident but the illustration of character?"[10] Incident as illustration of character is one of the keys of character development striven for. For full effectiveness there can be little detailed development of the characters by the author's explicit comment; incidents which reveal what he is are more important and effective. Eudora Welty's "Livvie" is an example of this; we are shown Livvie's reaction to a sick and dying old husband, and from this we infer her weakness.

It is true, of course, that if each facet of a character --his physical appearance, particularly--were revealed through incident, the process would be forced and boring. The author can hardly introduce incidents which reveal each character's height, weight, and complexion; sometimes a comment is necessary by the author. Still, we often do not need to know as much about a character's physical being as many authors give us. Little has been developed about the detailed outward appearance

of the characters. The reader can usually infer from suggestion what he needs to know. Thus, most of the personality of the characters can be developed by dynamic methods.

In addition to the modified stream of consciousness technique to be discussed later, the dynamic methods used here include setting, speech, conflict, situation, action, and reaction. It is apparent how use of each can induce the reader to draw conclusions. Setting is the external reflection of character, such as that of Violet Carney in "Love Thy Neighbor." Manner of speech reveals, and conflict reveals. The conflicts with motives inside the characters themselves are the important ones in the stories which follow. The conflicts with external forces only set up the action. And of course the reaction of characters to situation and action is an important part of the theme and an important part of character revelation. As in Wilbur Daniel Steele's "Blue Murder," the climax or the character's reaction to his problem is intended to give an insight into the character and motive.

The climax in most of the stories in this series establishes the fact of no change in the character. The length of the short story does not allow it to effectively deal with complex changes. Also, great changes are probably not typical of life. Like many of Anton Chekhov's, these stories have endings which intend to say, "And so it goes." Something has

happened, all right, but the characters haven't changed much, and we can infer what they will be like in the future. The climax should reveal something important about the character, however, which will help the reader understand more about the character than is known up to then. These ways of ending stories, as O'Faolain points out, "are therefore merely ways of reminding us, at the end of the story, that there was more to it than met the eye."[11]

One other important point about the methods of character development involves the author's attitude. The author's attitude toward his character may tell his reader to like or dislike that character. A stronger story results when the author is ambivalent or tells nothing; the reader should have the illusion that he has been allowed to make up his own mind. Moreover, the effect of the character may be strongest if the character is, like Hamlet, somewhat liked and somewhat disliked. It is not enough that the reader recognize that the character is human in his complexity of traits; the reader should emotionally feel the ambivalence. Such an effect is not possible if the author intercedes one way or the other.

In the following stories two techniques have been used in an attempt to establish such characterization. The first is simply to offer the character up in all his futility; a deliberate effort was made neither to express sympathy toward the character nor to deny him some dignity. This might

be pointed out particularly about the characters of the first three stories. Actions are used to suggest the personality and motives of the character; telling, summing up, and describing are methods too concrete and interpretative.

A second technique of characterization was to write on the level of the characters whatever description of action and exposition was necessary for the story. Even though the characters may be negative and disgusting in their weakness, perhaps seeing the world from their level helps the reader justify those weaknesses to himself.

Much of this discussion of characterization has to do with style; the latter point is strictly a matter of style and perhaps should be discussed as such. It will be noticed that in most of the stories, the first four or five particularly, the sequences of exposition and narration between speeches are often not in the strictest grammatical correctness. This is part of what was discussed above; we want to describe the world as Seton sees it in a selected stream-of-consciousness technique. That is why he "stamped the cigar out good" instead of crushing it out well. This is also why Opie is "mad" instead of angry and why Tippy gets "awful sick." The language of narration and description cannot, unless the writer wants the special ironic effect it can give, be much different from the level of that upon which his characters think, speak, or see. To jump to an author's precise English from the lower

level of the character's speech and thought (particularly if much exposition is done on the pre-speech level of stream-of-consciousness) involves an obvious intrusion by the author on the flow of the story.

In general, long descriptive passages from the author's point of view have been avoided. When a scene can be described through the character's consciousness, such description tells us both about the scene or action and the character. The last sentence from Hemingway's "Ten Indians" is an example: "In the morning there was a big wind blowing and the waves were high upon the beach and he was awake a long time before he remembered his heart was broken."

Whether from the author's point of view or the character's, more lengthy descriptions are avoided because they are seldom necessary to reveal the character or move the action. As was discussed in characterization, more about action, setting, incident, and character can be revealed by suggesting than by telling.

When "suggestion" is spoken of in conjunction with style, the connotative use of the language is also implied. The connotative use of the language is one of several points concerning the use of language which should be touched upon. The purely objective, realistic, and denotative use of the language is not as effective as its connotative use because it works on only one level. Although it is an intention in

these stories to remain for the most part clear and understandable, a symbolic expansion of meaning is striven for. As O'Faolain mentions, "Realistic detail . . . is a bore if it merely gives us an idle verisimilitude: its function is to be part of this general revelation by suggestion."[12]

Another stylistic point is the impressionism that plays a part in the development of some of the stories, for instance in the third story, "The Bed": "Victor laid his fat arm smelling on Jackson . . ."

A third device is the use of a blunt phrase to infer or compress action. In "State Fair Revue" Lex was searching for Betty. Once he "thought he saw her, and gladness was hurting him inside, but some other girl turned startled at his touch." Compression of the time element, as in "The Bed," can also sometimes be a comment on the triviality of what the characters have done with their time.

Imagery and rhythmic use of the language were not consciously worked for, but they were not avoided where their occurrence was natural and useful.

Something might be mentioned here about the style of "The Bed," since it is done somewhat differently from any of the others. The omniscient author point of view is not different from most of the others, but here the author is more detached from the action, being more interpretative. Sympathy would be forced for the main character if the action were told

from Jackson's point of view or even if the story followed closely the pattern of events as he might see them. The whole panaroma of Jackson's struggle is instead viewed somewhat sardonically, so that the reader's sympathy to the pathos of Jackson's situation should be reinforced as a reaction to the cold viewpoint. Irony is used here to avoid sentimentality. The nearest approach to an ironic tone in the other stories comes in "Opie and Tippy Were Sweethearts," "New Gravel Drive," and "State Fair Revue."

Also in "The Bed" space and time are compressed with little transition so that the story is a flowing, interacting whole. The greater complexity of sentence structure echos this and helps set the tone and atmosphere. In this story alone does there occur a passage which editorializes on the general human condition. But the people portrayed are like Jackson and they echo on a larger canvas what is pictured about Jackson's condition.

The use of style to gain tone and atmosphere was mentioned above. Additionally, the co-ordinate construction of "and . . . and . . . and" occurs often; it is intended in some places to gain the feel of continuity or expectant action and in others to gain the tone of oral narrative.

Symbolism and point of view will be mentioned next, but outside of these it is the use of style in selection and ordering of events that gives characters life, as discussed

earlier, and gives meaning to the story. Expression is a large part of plot; in the re-telling of these stories few of them would have value without the style to reveal meaning. "It is impossible to separate subject from the way it is presented,"[13] says David Daiches. A good share of the style of these stories consists in the selection of a series of moments which unite to give a composite of the character and his situation.

The use of omniscient point of view was touched on earlier. It is somewhat involved with style, depending upon the author's use of it. An author, given omniscience, may choose to editorialize or analyze his character's motives and state of mind to some length, thus making it a ponderous technique. However, it has "features favorable to brevity. . . A narrator who exists over and above the action itself may exercise . . . discretionary powers in matters of scale and selection."[14] He can manipulate his material, shift scene, time, place, or omit whenever purposeful. This latter use of omniscience as a tool of brevity was intended here; whenever possible its use for expanding or describing was avoided. With exceptions in two stories, "Opie and Dippy Were Sweethearts" and "Love Thy Neighbor," the consciousness of only one character is entered, a technique used well by Thomas Mann in "Disorder and Early Sorrow." Mann has Dr. Cornelius explore possibilities, sum up, and describe.

This technique of entering the mind of only one character was combined with omniscient point of view in all the stories. It was intended whenever possible that the language and point of view of the author should not enter the story noticeably. In many places this point of view differs little from the third person point of view. However, the reader usually knows more and sees more than he would have through the single person's consciousness.

As for symbolism, in only "The Bed" is the symbolism intended to give another complete dimension to the story. In this story the garish, brass-posted bed symbolizes the poverty which was Jackson's birthright and millstone which he carries with him wherever he goes. It might be pointed out, without going into complete detail, how Jackson's state is reflected in the recurring objects around him.

In the wider sense of the term "symbolism," all the stories, while primarily objective, use symbolic references and actions of characters. "Since the subjective is often intangible and abstract, which of itself cannot stir the emotions very effectively," points out Eugene Current-Garcia, "symbols are of especial value in providing the necessary links between inner and outer reality."[15] A person's actions are indicative or symbolic of his inner nature, just as Nick's reaction in Hemingway's "Ten Indians," quoted above, designated the transitory nature of his love. This, of course, has

a comment on all love. Symbolism is this; it reconciles the general and concrete.

In this way the reactions of the characters of the following stories are symbolic of some thus-clearly deliniated quality about them. Taken together, the revealed character and his actions have a wider meaning for everyone. As Dr. Jarvis Thurston phrases it, "In a sense every story in its totality is symbolic, that is, represents meanings more general and more involved than are concisely expressed in the story."[16] Isolated symbols used for strength add depth of meaning, such as Petey's fantasy, Opie's alcholism, Bill's dependence on a doodlebug, and like symbols, exist in all the stories. However, they are intended chiefly to point out something about the character rather than to have an allegorical significance: "Symbols <u>are</u> the story and take their meaning from the story's content,"[17] as Professors James Hall and Joseph Langland remind us.

Writing these stories has proven to be somewhat frustrating in that after several revisions they still are not in words quite what they seemed to be in their mental conception. At the same time this personal expression has been a deeply satisfying experience--as the creative process is inherently bound to be.

Just as important, writing this creative paper has created a field of reference for those things studied in

literature and fiction writing. An understanding of stream-of-consciousness technique, for instance, can never come quite so clearly as it does after one has tried to write it himself. One's appreciation for the skills of creative writers cannot be complete or soundly based until the skills themselves are thoroughly examined.

Particularly this work forces a student reading any work of literature to ask questions of himself, to make comparisons, and to read intensively--primary steps in developing taste. Scholarly inquiry and analysis are basic steps toward understanding and appreciation, of course, but the problems and achievements of writers come more alive when the student has tried that mode of communication for himself. He can be both more critical and more appreciative toward an author who has handled now-recognizable problems poorly or well. He can more validly make a judgment of the author's manipulation of a character, for example.

The student can also become more sensitive to the important organic relationships that go to make the total effect of the story, involving those points of style, symbol, characterization, setting and atmosphere, plot, tone, theme, and action. Every writer organizes these and manipulates them to his own end. A good writer has more than a "bag of tricks" to accomplish what he feels important, but his methods are recognizable when analyzed. Recognizing the author's methods and

intentions makes the effective story doubly effective. A writer's problem most often involves applying a universal theme to a concrete situation; understanding how he accomplishes this helps us to understand the theme.

Although they grew as corollary from this study, such rewards can hardly be regarded as secondary in importance and value.

FOOTNOTES

[1]From Norman Friedman's definition of a static story as opposed to a dynamic story in "What Makes a Short Story Short?" Modern Fiction Studies, IV, 2 (1958), 108.

[2]Oliver Evans, "The Theme of Moral Isolation in Carson McCullers," New World Writing, I (1953), 299.

[3]Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, Understanding Fiction (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1959), p. 81.

[4]Simon O. Lesser, Fiction and the Unconscious (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), p. 78.

[5]René Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1949), p. 140.

[6]Sean O'Faolain, The Short Story (New York: Devin-Adair Co., 1951), p. 171. Jarvis Thurston in Reading Modern Short Stories (Chicago: Scott-Foresman Co., 1955), p. 16, says on this subject, "It is certainly characteristic of the contemporary story that its action tends to be very slight."

[7]O'Faolain, p. 172.

[8]James R. Frakes and Isadore Trascher, Short Fiction (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1959), p. 46.

[9]Brooks and Warren, p. 80.

[10]Henry James, "The Art of Fiction," Literary Criticism, ed. Gay W. Allen and Harry H. Clark (New York: American Book Co., 1941), p. 552.

[11]O'Faolain, p. 159.

[12]O'Faolain, p. 164.

[13]David Daiches, Study of Literature (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1948), p. 80.

[14]Friedman, p. 117.

[15]Eugene Current-Garcia, "Introduction," American Short Stories, ed. Eugene Current-Garcia and Walton Patrick (Chicago: Scott-Foresman Co., 1952), p. li.

[16]Thurston, p. 23.

[17]James B. Hall and Joseph Langland, The Short Story (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1956), p. 374.

I. IN THE TREE

"If I was in the country, I'd be better off," thought Seton. "I kinda like the country; I like the trees." Somebody was always kidding him about getting a job. "They wouldn't do that if I was in the country." That wouldn't be too good either, though. He liked to talk to people. But sometimes they talked about the same thing too much and he didn't like it.

Seton brought his lanky form to a squat against the wall of Crane's drug store, just around the corner from Main Street and along the highway. This way he could see both ways, and this busy time around five o'clock was the time he liked to be here. Best place for sunshine, too, colder parts of the year. Lots of times on warm days old men kept him company along his wall.

Taking his time about deciding whether he wanted a cigarette or cigar, Seton ran his fingers over his pockets and felt all of them he had. They were sorted out--cigars in the left pockets, cigarettes in the right. He liked to carry a lot of them; they felt good when their weight hung in his pockets. He used to give them away to his friends. "Not any more, boy!" he thought, sullen as he thought of the whole pack of cigarettes that somebody took one day.

A group of high school boys came down the street. "There's Seton, keepin' things runnin'," said one.

"Gotta say hello to Seton," another said, and they made a chorus of "Hiya, Seton," and "How are you, Seton!" and "Seton, how ya doin'." One gave him a half-salute.

Seton answered the salute and grinned at them. They almost always talked to him. He went to all the high school games and sometimes stayed for the whole thing. "That Bud Stevens is a good player," he remembered someone had said this morning in the barber shop. He was the one who saluted Seton. Seton remembered he could have been a good basketball player too, ten years ago in high school--if they had let him stay. Suddenly he decided it was a cigar he wanted to smoke.

After a little while there weren't as many people and nobody had stopped to talk, so Seton decided he might as well go eat. He stamped the cigar out good and stuck the butt in his teeth. Then he pulled his cap down and his jeans up. But he jammed his hands into his pockets until the jeans were almost off his long hips. "Mom will have roast beef tonight," he said aloud. He threw his weight up in a couple of bouncy steps. "Mashed potatoes," he hopped. "Maybe . . ." and he skipped great, long, loping skips with his elbows flapping, ". . . maybe a piece of pie!"

But he knew she wouldn't, and he walked a few steps. Mom was old. They would have lunch meat sandwiches and he would have to open a can of something. But even so after every two or three steps Seton skipped again, throwing his lean six-and-

a-half feet forward in a rhythmic jerk because it felt right. He hurdled over the ground. "After supper," he declared to no one, "I'll have a glass of beer, though!" He thought of the smell of Sam's pool hall. He liked it in there--most of the time. Even when he didn't, that was the place he never missed. Every day he was at Sam's place after supper, right near to seven o'clock. "Sam's. Sam's Place," he said. He whistled a little. Maybe he wouldn't go to the bowling alley tonight after Sam's. He would just stay there until late.

But after supper when Seton got to Sam's, talking and skipping past lighted windows without bothering to look in, he remembered he didn't have any money at all. It was a long time since Mom had got the check he owned part of.

Still, just going into the delicious-smelling dimness with its blare of bright lights over the tables was fun. He took a seat to the side and watched the bright dancing balls on the grass-green tables for a while. He grunted a few notes of an impromptu song. Then he got tired of watching. The beer smelled good and he walked over near Sam, and after a while Sam spoke to him.

"Want somethin', Seton, or you just watchin' tonight?"

Seton moved his head, trying to think what to do. Then he moved closer to Sam and bent down to speak. He fingered his bulging back pocket. "Give you a pack of cigarettes for a beer," he said.

"Aw, no, Seton. They're all mashed up."

Seton hesitated. "The check will get in here tomorrow, maybe," he bobbed nervously. He wasn't sure of the time of the check that his dead father somehow still sent, but he hadn't had one for a long time. Even his pockets were pretty empty.

"Naw, Seton, you can't start doin'that," Sam said. "Nope. Sorry, Seton."

Seton looked around at the sitting men. No one was moving very much; they were just sitting there not even looking happy although almost every one had a cold, yellow beer in front of him. Sometimes Sam would just give him a small glass to drink slow. Seton jiggled and waited.

One of the men who had been his friend in high school when Seton had gone there for a while nudged the man he was with and came over to Seton. Seton didn't know the other man.

"Hey, Seton," Jude said. "Got a cigarette for an old buddy?"

Seton fumbled in his shirt pocket and drew out a mangled pack. He started to get out a cigarette for Jude when he noticed the other man laughing at them. He started to take back the cigarette, then thought for a moment and gave it to Jude.

"Uh . . . what're ya drinkin' tonight, Jude?"

"Seton, come here!" interrupted Sam. Jude left and

Sam continued: "I told you about trying to get drinks from the customers, Seton."

He walked away from Sam and sat down again. One of the boys waiting for his turn to shoot spoke to him.

"What are you doin' these days, Seton?"

Seton smiled at him. "Little of everything."

"Not workin' too hard, are you?" asked the other boy seriously after he cracked the balls and missed. Then he laughed.

Seton didn't say anything.

"Lotsa people could use a big guy like you, Seton. Oughta give it a try!"

They weren't really being friendly, and Seton knew it. Usually he'd talk to them anyway, but he was tired of them tonight. He was real tired of Sam's, too. He stood up and wondered a little. Then he walked out. Sam looked after him; Seton hadn't left this early in the ten-odd years he'd been coming here.

Seton shuffled down the street, feeling sadder than he ever had since he had the job. "I worked once," he said aloud defiantly, and remembered how bad it had been having to do the same thing all the time every day. He knew Jude hadn't really been friendly back there, too. They were all different now; they used to have a lot of fun when they all ditched out of school together. He was the only one who even tried to have

that kind of fun now. That was what was wrong with them: always doing the same thing.

Seton didn't want to go to the bowling alley; he knew what it would be like without going. He watched to see who was coming out of the picture show, but there was hardly anybody. Seton was feeling real bad. He tried to whistle, but there was no place he wanted to go or nothing else to do.

Then he remembered. "The tree!" he said and leaped down the street. He talked about it all the way out to the edge of the park. There Seton stood bouncing his shoulders and head as he looked up into his tree. "In the morning," he said. "In the morning."

In the morning Seton tried it the old way again. But they didn't want him in the barber shop. When he thought about it, he could tell all morning that people avoided him. He still didn't have any money for Sam.

And when he thought about the tree, there was nothing else he wanted to do.

Puffing from his climb, he looked around with a new perspective from his seat in the snagged crotch of that curious, tall-trunked tree. He liked it up here, and he put off anything else for a while. He lay the coil of rope he'd been saving over the limb. His hand rubbed the broken end of one of the limbs spreading to make the Y where he sat, and Seton wondered again how it came to be broken off. But he

didn't try to solve the problem. Seton sat with his chin almost on his chest, and his mind wandered. His mind often played games with him--now it was doing that slow motion he liked so well. When he swung his foot it seemed as if it took many seconds for it to make the arc, and when he lifted his hand, it was almost apart from him because it seemed to move so slowly. It was a drifting, dreamy feeling, half awake. Sounds were distorted most strangly of all, and Seton crooned a few words to himself, enjoying the way they seemed dragged out, divided into many, many syllables. I-e-e a-e-em e-u-un a-e-e ta-w-o-ol-l tr-e--. As he shifted his position, the feeling left just as it had come, of its own accord, because try as he might Seton couldn't bring the feeling himself. And he did try, because he would have liked to live in that fuzzy world all the time. Otherwise he was getting so bored.

The sway of the tree could be felt in the big limb where Seton sat, and he enjoyed the feeling as he did so often. But it wasn't enough now. The meaning of everything just wasn't clear. "Seems like I could think clear now if I'm ever going to," he thought. He hadn't had a beer for three days. Thinking about that, he felt his pockets. He could find less than two packs of cigarettes altogether.

Seton flipped the loop of the rope that lay coiled in the tree over the jagged branch near him. What he planned to

do bothered him a little, but it delighted him in a strange way, and he felt excited. Besides, he had been unable to think of a single reason why he shouldn't. Making a half-hitch in the rope, he looped it again and again around the broken limb so it wouldn't be too long. He was done fashioning a loop in the other end before he heard the voices. He hadn't noticed anyone coming, but five men stood beneath the tree and another was half-running across the park. From the tumble of calling voices Seton understood they were asking him to come down. There was Jude again, who had been such a good friend so long ago.

"Hey, Pedro," he was saying (no one had called him Pedro since those happy days), "You look silly as hell with that rope around your neck!" Seton jerked it off. "Com'n down and we'll throw one like we used to. Come on--beer's on us." Everyone echoed Jude's suggestion. Seton chuckled. They sounded like fun, and happy.

When he had climbed down, everyone shoved around, and the noisy group that sounded so sincere and happy moved away. But soon conversation lulled. "Pedro" looked over his shoulder at the snag-limbed tree.

"Wait a minute, fellas. No use leaving that rope up there." He reversed and hopped back to get it, and the group followed him. They were his friends! Listen to them!

But they were quieter; they walked less boisterously

now. Most of them slumped with their hands thrust in their pockets, and someone cleared his throat self-consciously. Seton suddenly knew it! They were bored worst of all! Fifty feet from the tree, Seton lumberingly galloped from the group and mounted up the trunk. The climb wasn't nearly as hard this time--a new feeling had taken hold of him.

Once in the crotch of the tree, Seton stood up as he reached for the rope.

"Hey, men!" he shouted, and his voice was strong and clear. "Wanna see some excitement?"

And the curious, tall-trunked tree creaked and bowed to its sudden-added, swinging weight.

II. OPIE AND TIPPY WERE SWEETHEARTS

Tippy Newsond was tall and her thinness made her angular where curves should have been; a sharp nose above a pointed chin seemed right for the rest of her. But her sister was good-looking, and for a couple of guys who weren't used to the best anyway, there was a way for at least one of them to luck out. That was to date the pair. Alf considered the scheme a good one, and after Alf agreed to pay for the whiskey Opie agreed, because Rubie, Tippy's sister, wouldn't have gone out with him anyway.

Of course, they weren't really original with the idea, because it was the usual way most guys got wanton Rubie into their parked cars. Tippy was the older sister, and Rubie didn't want Tippy feeling bad if she went out too much and Tippy had to stay home and not have any fun. Tippy liked to have fun and liked the way everyone laughed for her when haze from the drinks made it difficult to say why they laughed.

And there was another reason Opie was really ready to go when Alf talked to him. Opie hadn't had a drink since day before yesterday and he was feeling pretty bad. Besides that, it was Saturday and he was broke. "What ya got, Alf?" he asked, pretending not to be too interested.

"Well, I got a pint of White Lightning and Jay Busby owes me some of that peach brandy to go with it."

"Where'd ya get the Lightning?"

"Sim brought it down from Pinion. It's okay." And after Opie angled for a sample and made a face and pronounced it good stuff, he questioned whether they'd have enough for four or whether just the two of them ought to cat around in Alf's 1938 Ford.

"What d'ya mean enough? I can get a quart of that brandy, and you know two drinks of Busby's brandy is enough to knock you on your ass!" Then after Opie laughed from the warm glow of the Lightning, Alf added, "We'd better go out this afternoon and talk to 'em, or somebody else will beat us to the goodies."

Opie laughed again, and they drove out to Newsond's place. Just Tippy and Rubie were home, because their mother would be down working in her cafe until mianight on Saturday night. Alf went to the door and quite a bit of time passed; finally Opie sneaked another little drink of Lightning from under the seat. Tippy didn't come out, although Opie saw her looking around the side of the house once. He pretended he didn't see her.

Then Alf came out of the house and Rubie followed him as they talked. "That Alfie is a good-looking son-of-a-gun," thought Opie, feeling big toward his friend. He watched Rubie as she hugged a porch post and looked around it down at Alf and his car, talking and flirting with him. Her blouse was out and had a button undone as it was a hot day and she

had probably been working around the house. Opie didn't mind going out with Tippy too much because they would drive around fast in Alf's car and probably go to a lot of places in Pinion. It was a big time just going in all the honky-tonks; it was better when he had somebody to push around the dance floors with. Somebody was always feeling good and buying drinks and shouting and back-pounding. Last time they had seen a good fight, too.

"We'll pick 'em up at seven-thirty," said Alf as he jumped into the car. He looked at Opie. "You didn't sneak a drink?" he smiled, and they both laughed as Opie said of course he didn't. Alf got out the bottle and called Rubie to come down and taste it. She made a terrible face, sucked several breaths, and coughed for a long time while Alf and Opie laughed and took a drink themselves. Then Tippy came out with a red scarf tied around her straight hair. She walked slowly toward them and smiled at their laughing. "Here ya go, Tippy," Alf said, and passed her the bottle. She took a little drink, but never said anything, even when everyone else said good-by and Alf and Opie drove away. But you could tell she was happy by the way she smiled.

That night they went to Pinion, all right, and Tippy and Opie in the back seat talked a lot after they had been drinking the brandy and Lightning, mixed with pop for the girls. They shouted against the wind rushing around them

because the windows open made it more exciting. Every time the car skidded around the corner the girls shrieked. Opie was telling Tippy about all the money he was going to make as soon as he could open him up a joint in Ivamar like the ones in Pinion.

"They's a lot of oilfield crews around here now," he told Tippy.

"Yeah, Momma says that they's lots of 'em comin' in the cafe lately," Tippy added wisely. They were very close together in the back seat with their arms locked around each other, and every time the car turned a corner they came out all jumbled together. Tippy knew this was the way it was always supposed to be on a date.

"And I figger after things get boomin' down this way a little more, I can clear forty dollars or so even on a weeknight. Hard to say how much on Saturday night. Be six hundred dollars a month, easy," he said, liking the way it sounded. They had another little drink, and Tippy hiccoughed.

She coughed, and then said shyly proud, "I've got six hundred dollars."

She hadn't said it very loud, and Opie shouted, "What did you say?"

"I said, I've got six hundred dollars," she yelled and shook her head proudly in the wind.

Opie pulled her down beside him and said in her ear,

"Have ya really?"

"Sure. Poppa left it to me." Then she thought and said a little sadly. "Momma won't let me spend it though. She says it's for when I get married."

"Say, Tippy, that's a lot of do-re-mi you got!" They both laughed at the funny way Opie said it and nearly fell down in front of the seat they were so dizzy. When they sat up and could talk for the way they were laughing, Opie said. "You're so rich we oughta get married." Tippy giggled a couple of times from her laughing and looked real straight at Opie and smiled. She didn't look so bad. It made Opie stop and think.

Opie remembered that on the way home about two o'clock the car had stopped in a pasture. Tippy had been pretty drunk because after she couldn't taste any more, Opie had stopped putting pop in her drinks. She had been sick, but afterwards had felt better and Opie gave her just some brandy and pop. He remembered Alf and Rubie had gone someplace, and Tippy and he had been lying on the grass beside the car. She was real white in the moonlight. Once when she was awake she had stated like a fact, "You like me, don't you, Opie? You have more dates than anyone else with me." She giggled a little and put her arm over her eyes. Then she twisted around a little bit on the grass and whimpered, "This bed is all wet."

The last side road off to Newsond's house was awful bad with ruts and a creek and a bad place to turn around. Alf was

shaking his head because he hadn't been driving too well anyway, and Rubie said, "The walking in will do us a lot of good," and she tilted her head at Tippy asleep in the back seat. When they got Tippy woke up, she wouldn't let Rubie help her at all and kept shaking her off her arm. After Alf and Opie drove off, Rubie got mad at the way Tippy kept acting and just walked on ahead. Tippy tried to follow her and fell down twice because the ground kept coming up sideways. The third time she scratched her hand on a stick; whimpering she crawled a little ways to a sand pile and sat down heavily on it.

After a while Tippy had stinging places all over her legs and arms and then everywhere else. She called to Rubie and then Opie to help her; then she tried to get up. When she fell down again, she cried from the stings and because Rubie was gone. She cried until the tears ran off her palms as she rubbed her eyes. Finally Rubie came a d brushed her off and helped her to the house.

Opie had come out by himself after that a few times to see Tippy in the evenings when the mother was home; sometimes he was cold sober, too. Mamma said it was almost like he was really courtin', especially since sometimes he had to walk when he couldn't borrow anyone's car. He still didn't have a job, just sometimes selling stuff for Sim around the oil rigs moving in.

All that time, though, Tippy was feeling bad in the

mornings and sometimes all day. Her stomach was sick pretty often, and that's how Tippy noticed it was swollen and felt tight. She put liniment on it one night, but when she was pretty sick again the next morning she got scared and told Mamma that she had a swelling. At first Mamma had thought it might have been infection from all the ant bites. Then she looked and asked Tippy about how regular she had been. Time wasn't too well-defined for Tippy, and she was embarrassed and guessed she had been anyhow, so she told Mamma yes.

"It does feel kinda feverish," Mamma said. "You better use some of that hot liniment on it today and I'll bring home some ice for a pack tonight." And Tippy and Mamma massaged the swelling with Raleigh's liniment and put some in a bandage for the daytimes and used ice packs at night. The swelling didn't get any better.

Things were getting pretty bad f r Opie. His old man quit giving him any money at all, and Sim didn't like to have Opie getting any cut on his business. Besides, he had been scouting around and had located an old railroad car in good shape that he could buy for $125. He was all stewed up about it because there were a lot of crews moving in around Ivamar, and he knew if he didn't get a joint set up pretty soon somebody would beat him to it. Tippy's six hundred dollars kept creeping into his mind and he'd go out to see her. But he couldn't make up his mind if it was worth marrying her for,

and he couldn't see any other way of getting it with Mamma keeping an eye out.

Opie figured he could hit a stake gambling, but he lost his watch and a cream-can mash still that it had taken him over a year to build. So the next time he saw Tippy what she said did it.

"Mamma said they is more money than I thought. I'd get $750 if I was to be married," she said.

Opie was careful to work the subject away from the money before he said it, so it wouldn't seem like that had anything to do with it. Even Tippy wasn't so dumb sometimes. "She's not so bad, anyhow," thought Opie. "Least she doesn't argue and fight around with you. It'd be nice having a place kept up for you and meals cooked. She could even help out in the club!"

So Opie bought the railroad car and was real industrious putting up a foundation of concrete blocks and steps and seeing that a platform was built on to the side for dancing, just the way some were at Pinion. Then he bought a new suit of clothes and got a bootlegger's address and went all the way to Kansas City and came back with several kegs that had MOLASSES written on them. He had himself a high-breasted yaller woman while he was there and was very drunk when they helped him off the train.

Business picked up slowly, and Saturday night two weeks later Opie had decided he better have Tippy help out. He

explained to her all there was to it and put a couple of new recordings on the battered music box he'd bought. Along with the assortment of derrick hands and roughnecks, Opie got a lot of weekend business from Russian and Bohemian farm boys, and they liked loud, fast music and barroom ballads. When everyone started pouring in, the music never stopped. Opie knew it was good business for the management to keep it running, and he often did that the last part of the evenings to keep the crowd busy and buying. Opie, like all the honky-tonk owners around, sold drinks over the bar even though there was prohibition.

It was a lively crowd tonight, and Opie was outside giving some of his friends a drink of some bonded stuff he had. "Hello mah honey, hello mah baby, hello mah rag-time gal . . ." the juke box was blaring when Tippy came out and motioned to him. Opie was disgusted, because he'd been having so much trouble with her making change, he might just have given up and done it himself if it hadn't made him so angry.

"Which is the fifty-cent whiskey?" she asked him, and he'd already showed her where the kegs were and how to get a drink without spilling it.

He took her back and showed her. "Right in that keg there," he said loudly.

It wasn't but a minute later she was back. "Which is the dollar whiskey," she wanted to know. ". . . walkin' the

floor over you," a nasal hillbilly singer added.

He led her back and showed her the keg again. "In that keg right there," he said pounding it. That did simplify things for her somewhat, however. Then she asked him what to give the young roustabout who wanted puskey, and he didn't try to explain but just told her to tell everybody who asked that they didn't have any. She did so very seriously.

Then someone asked Opie when they were expecting the new arrival. He took a careful look at Tippy as she walked around with the glasses. She was putting on too much weight in a suspicious place. He was pretty dizzy when everyone was gone about three o'clock, but the longer he looked at Tippy the madder he got.

"Are you pregnant?" he shouted at her after he locked the door.

Tippy was sleepy and tiredly sitting on a bench. There was a record on and Tippy didn't hear; she opened her eyes to look at him. "What?" she said defensively, hearing his angry tone of voice. She had been thinking how her husband was going to be proud she had worked so hard for him that night.

"Frankie and Johnnie" blared loudly in the gap of silence.

"Are you gonna have a baby?" he accused, angrier for having to repeat the charge.

"Maybe I am," she said wonderingly, and Opie couldn't

tell whether or not it had just occurred to her.

"We've only been married a month!" screamed Opie. He lurched to the back room and got the .22 he had hidden for emergencies. "I'm gonna shoot you!"

Surprised and scared, Tippy began crying. "You wouldn't shoot me," she blubbered.

"The hell I won't!"

He stood for a moment, weaving. Tippy got to her feet, started to take a step and then didn't. Her tears had stopped, and from some source she found a commanding anger. "You <u>won't</u> shoot me."

Opie lifted the .22 and stopped. ". . . was her man, but he was a doin' her wrong," the song wailed on, providing a background for the tableau. "No, I can't do it," thought Opie. "But there's that dumb bitch lording it over me because I can't." He pointed the gun downward a little, shut his eyes and pulled the trigger. ". . . oh, what a couple in love!" declared the singer. Opie was shocked by the explosion.

Tippy screamed and fell hard against the table. Still screaming, terrified, she accused, "You did, you <u>did</u> shoot me! Oh! Oh!" And she lay sobbing on the floor holding her foot. Opie threw the gun against the side of the boxcar and fell beside her, pulling off her shoe so he could help ease the hurt.

A little more than a year later, by the time the boom was at its peak around Ivamar, Opie and Tippy had their second baby. Opie was making a lot of money at his boxcar joint, but he had little to show for it except a bad stomach and an infected liver. Opie gave a lot of drinks to the three-day hands who would listen to him and pretend to take seriously what he had to say.

Opie's house wasn't the best when he got it, but now it was looking pretty bad. It was a fact, people said, that Opie himself had busted right through that door because it was locked when he came home drunk one night. Tippy had helped him nail some boards across it so they could hang it back up. There were a couple of windows out and the yard was all grown up with sunflowers and ragweed. Tippy hardly ever went outside, now. And Opie was "not about to mow a damned lawn," as he said to Tippy. They didn't talk much, but Opie had been right--she didn't give him any trouble. She fed him every day and went to bed with him every night.

Tippy liked the babies when they were quiet and played and laughed, and sometimes she'd play with them. But what she thought most about them was how they had hurt, coming. When they cried, she fed them. But if they kept crying she could rock in her chair and think about other things until she didn't hear them at all. What she usually did was to take the radio and her chair into the other room and listen to the good

stories that came on at ten o'clock and went on nearly all day.

Every two weeks or so Opie would personally go to Kansas City to bring in his own kegs of whiskey. "When does Opie get back?" the kids around Ivamar said to each other.

"On the eleven o'clock tonight," one of them answered. Two or three of them would always slip out to meet Opie's train.

"We'll take him home," they said to the depot agent when the porter pushed Opie insensible off the train. "Opie, we'll take you home," they told him as they walked him down the railroad tracks across the ties.

"Goin' home," from Opie.

"Don't we get a quarter for taking you home, Opie?" they asked. Opie gave them all the change in his pockets. He smiled and laughed and giggled, even, as he fell down and got back up. He told the boys how much money he was making and asked them if they wanted a drink. The boys always took Opie across South Ravine several times. The sewer ran into there and it was always wet and smelly.

"Ish wet," Opie said. "Musta rained here." He laughed the first few times he fell into the sticky muck.

"Yeah, Opie, that's right. Rained about a foot last night," all the boys chimed in. "Come on. Got to go right up here now."

Before it ceased to be fun for the boys, Opie was muddied all over. He wiped off a coat of mud from one arm and slowly and sadly shook it from his hand. He breathed deeply with resignation two or three times, and dolefully tried to focus his eyes on a path he couldn't see. When Opie looked serious like this, it wasn't fun for the boys any more, and they took him to his sagging yard gate and left him sad and staring.

Then they whooped off down the street laughing about how funny Opie looked bobbing and swooping when he tried to walk over the railway ties.

III. THE BED

The house that was the home of the bed was a square, native-limestone, two-story relic. A stubby sickened tree, whose meager height belied its age, struggled to get above verdure surrounding the house. Coarse sticky sunflowers always grew, even when the scorcher sun cremated everything else, burned out a Kansas tenant farmer's hopes of a decent living, and turned him to odd jobs of which there were none. Mare's-tail and giant ragweed and fireweed crowded for breathing space, making a fine jungle for Jackson to explore. A worn-out lilac, disgraceful in its solitude, grew near the steps, and Jackson once thought that was beautiful also.

The other thing (and it seemed no more than a single, definite, uncommunicative thing) that Jackson thought was beautiful was the bed. Brass corner posts and garish moldings in the bedstead bars only partly made it so. Jackson had been born in this bed. The bed was beautiful and his mother was beautiful--thin and strong and always there--the big hard house was pleasure and the wild loneliness of outside a glad wonder. His father was very quiet, stooped and thin, and his sad eyes didn't tell Jackson that it wasn't true that everybody was hungry most of the time. He was all right too.

The bed was part of Jackson's life. His mother told him how they had bought it and carried it until they stopped here in this corner of the flatland and moved it with poverty

(only she didn't say just that and Jackson didn't understand that anyhow, just yet) into the house that stood in the lonely middle of a dust field. How he had been born into it and then it was his, too. The oil that came later brought the nomad barbarian people but didn't bring prosperity to dirt farmers, although somewhat to the merchants in the near shoddy town, so that they raised the prices, making it even harder for his father; but Jackson didn't know that either.

As Jackson grew, his father did nothing, and Jackson as a matter of nature grew able to do nothing almost as well as his father.

"But he's a good-hearted little thing," said his teachers to one another, usually accompanying this with a slow shaking of the head. "He's dirty," overheard Jackson from a group of little girls. But his mother had a beautiful dress made of bright pink taffeta with flowers and a huge furry ribbon and it skrisshed where it rubbed together.

His mother wore that dress when they buried his father. There were five people, Victor somebody and some others he didn't know to well. She cried sounding like what Jackson had heard sometimes at night in the bed. A bird's antics on a nearby stone greatly interested Jackson during the proceedings. It wasn't much more quiet when his father was gone, because he was so quiet anyhow, but the boys that Jackson played with at school were more hushed for a while. The only thing was that

the windows of the house stared at him now when he came up the road. The weeds around the house he noticed, since he had seen that lots of people's houses looked different. Their children had different lunches than his, too.

A little while later some other people moved in with them. Jackson didn't know who they were or why or from where they came. She was as corpulent as he was strippy, and he had the same eyes as his father had except with a brutish brown moustache. They had an old car and moved in with only a few things, but Jackson kept his bed. Sometimes the man worked and sometimes he was home, but he didn't talk to Jackson. His mother and he were gone often, there was noise from unknown abominations in the old house at night, and his mother was different. Undersized Jackson was learning things, but not from recitation room grammars. Varnished concoctions of the reasons for being and things for doing made him reconstruct his world and examine some new-found aspirations of his own. He never supposed people did things like that. He asked himself questions about everyone, even the couple living with them, but he never quite included his mother.

But when it was fall and he was sixteen, they looked at him and said, "She left."

"How?"

"With a man--don't know where." Propelled to her room he was forced to include his mother in what people did.

A cheap perfume she had was in the room, and a cheap gaudy pink flowered rag of a dress was left with other mnemonics, but she was gone, she was dirty and he hated her. A picture of her showed skinny ugliness looking out, and he slowly tore it up. Not much in the room--a scarred dresser and odds and ends. A picture of his father he wanted but could not find. The window was broken, and leaning outside Jackson could see loneliness and feel futility in the contorted pointing limbs of the scraggy tree and burned-brown weeds and flat nothingness of a barren fall that followed an unproductive summer. Jackson would have liked to busted him one if he knew where he was.

Victor Franz had been friendly to Jackson, and Jackson had long ago connected this vaguely with his being at his father's funeral. He had had his first beer in Victor's tawdry back room, where he served them while he sold groceries in front. Victor had had too many of the same himself, and perhaps this contributed to the fact that many considered him insensate. Obese, drunken, low life, demented? What mattered was that Victor took the lost Jackson in. But though there was plenty to eat in the Franz hovel, Jackson's bed went with him when he moved. In this way Jackson left his Augean stable of poverty.

Victor and his wife fought and had a daughter. The arguments were loud, and the daughter was skinny, scared, thirteen. Jackson had noticed her before and had even thought about her.

because she was not smart and hard like others he could never reach. Affecting sadness was transfused with a delicate embarrassment and shared by both when Jackson and his bed moved in.

Jackson worked for Victor irregularly, and Victor put his fat arm smelling on him and said "Call me Vic, okay, Jackboy?" They served more in the back room than they did the front, and Jackson saw redfaced round and dryboned gaunt farmers who spent their last quarters for an unassuaging beer. Oilfield roughnecks were there with their women who were so tawdry it seemed impossible that even men coarse as they could use them as women. The sun beat with a hard weight on the roof and on the flatland with its dismal burden of upright animals who tried but didn't possess enough reason to escape misery. For the few days it wasn't burning it was windpierced cold, and the animals who didn't grow fur struggled with gooseflesh toward the minute they could again huddle in their lairs.

It was winter soon after Jackson came to Victor's. Bad for business, and Victor evidently often tried to take the surplus upon himself. He and his wife were often gone from home (their wranglings were always insistent, but had no effect on their relationship) and now often overnight and even whole weekends. The strange selfspeaking shyness between the two left alone was an open question to Jackson, and he thought--and thought. The mystification of budding changes and even the

muteness of the sounds from her room excited him. He caught her struggling twisting, and they had their first kiss, which was a surprising nothingness for both but didn't keep the shadowed fantasies from growing.

She took a bath that Sunday night when Victor and his wife were gone and Jackson was there, and she stayed until he opened the unlocked door. Hunching the universal crossed-limbed gesture of bareness very quietly with pallid shoulder-length brown hair, she said lowly and quietly, woman-like, "Go away." But her eyes were pleading and full of fear of what must come. Jackson's mouth was very dry, and he quivering went away. He couldn't breathe deeply enough, and he pulled lungfulls that jerked.

He was waiting when she came out, also waiting, and she was very quiet. Then she struggled with elbows and knees and then was quiet and he led-carried her to his bed. He laid her bare, and they struggled against one another, as against the transgression, and he exposed his awe to her exposed young wondering bareness, stunned by flatwise contours and she to his crested arching over. The even perfunctory imperfection left no time or room for breathing. This was the first of many.

Jackson saw her Kilroy-was-here swelling before Victor, but Victor finally saw it and found him and looked at him and hit him. "You bastard! You'll marry her."

Jackson laid his head back on the floor and knew it was true.

"No, I won't," she said whimpering, not knowing why she said it, but not daring to leave what shredded bits of asylum had been to her a home for thirteen years. Drawing impossible self-respect and courage from some source, she continued to go to school. Ignoring the growth did not stop its perpetual purpose, and her schoolmates in the end accomplished what Victor's fist had not. "What was it like," sniggered the imbecilic adopted daughter of the hardwareman. "Mother says you're filthy-dirty," said the haughty daughter of a haughty mother with a cold enjoying look.

A week of school was left when she said, "Yes," with a more defeated whippering.

The Justice only shrugged at the six-month protrusion that had bound the two before his brief words could effect that purpose. They had been before him with different faces and would be again.

There was but one place that Jackson knew to go, and they went there. More windows were gone, and the weeds were high with the new summer and hid the diseased lilac bush, but the limestone of the house was eternal. They were already hungry when they moved in with the bed. It was the first and last thing with them. And the bare, twisted tree pointed at them with its stunted limbs.

IV. THE NEW GRAVEL DRIVE

About 10 o'clock Tom and Jake were sitting in the shade beside the machine shed, taking it easy. The shade was just a sliver now, and they had moved back until each had his knees drawn against his chest in order to get out of the beating sun. Jake had his usual cheekful of tobacco.

Jake was the older, 30, a not-too-powerful six-foot-three with a pot belly. Tom was 19, but in his judgment of himself against Jake he often forgot that he was younger. That was because Tom knew inside himself that he was going to be a success and really amount to something. But for now, they both worked for Forrest on his showplace farm.

Forrest had gone on one of his frequent vacations or business trips; Tom or Jake didn't know which, they just got jobs assigned in detail when he left, and were supposed to have them done when he got back. They liked the set-up because more often than not he'd give them too little to do, and they'd finish it quickly and have a couple of days in town before he returned. The promise of that always made the work go faster.

Today was a little different. It was Sunday, but Jake and Tom were having a heated discussion, which was remarkable, considering the languorous weather of this particular Sunday.

"Hell, what for?" Jake was saying. "The old man

didn't give us anything to do for today. It's Sunday!"

"You got to have some incentive," replied Tom. "How ya ever expect to get anyplace if you just follow orders?" It's when you do sumpthin' extra that you get someplace."

"Now look at Austin," Tom went on. "Do you suppose Forrest built that house for him and his wife for just doin' what he told him to and nothin' else?"

"Yeah, but he's been working here for about ten years. If we'd go and ask him for sumpthin' else to do, he'd just give us the dirty end of the stick and it wouldn't do us no good either." And Jake settled down for a day of leisure.

"No, that's not what I mean. We got to do sumpthin' on our own that the Old Man will notice when he comes back. It's bound to do us some good." Jake just grunted so Tom went on. "Now I been thinkin'. Last time it rained there was chuck-holes full of water all over the drive, and the gravel's been gettin' thin all over. We could just haul a couple a loads and fill them up and Forrest would be sure to notice it. Wouldn't take us long, and we could get it from Sam's gravel pit where they been hauling gravel for the new road. Won't be anybody around today. Now, dammit, come on!"

Tom nearly dragged Jake to the truck, where they put on the gravel boards and threw in two shovels. Jake drove, like he always did, since he was older. The gravel pit was only a-bout three miles away, but as he drove Jake began to get the

feeling of accomplishment about the task just as Tom had.

The whole road was cut-up and soft because the county was grading it up, but they could see it was going to be a good road when it was finished. They drove around the detour beside the new bridge and across the creek. The bridge was just a concrete skeleton and the detour around it was soft; but the creek was very low because it was a hot, dry, summer. They commented on all these things, feeling very expansive because they were doing something on their own.

The gravel pit was on the hill beside the road, just across the creek. The new road cut through part of the hill and exposed quite a bit of gravel, and a big pile of it was shoved up beside the roadbed. "Let's get it from that pile there," said Jake.

"No, down in the pit we ought to be able to back against a steep bank and just kick it in," replied Tom. So he opened the big wire gate that displayed a No Trespassing sign, and they drove into the pit. It was a huge pit, used for years, and piles of sand, rock and gravel with dirt in it were pushed everywhere. A beaten red crawler with a sand scoop seemed heaped in one corner of the pit. But there was no steep bank of gravel. They contemplated shoveling the load, and Tom even threw in a few experimental shovel-fulls, but it was a hot day and the worthy cause of the work didn't make it any easier. So they drove back out to the pile of gravel beside the road.

Jake backed up to it, nearly getting stuck, and they got out to start the loading.

"Looks to me like they piled this up here to use," said Jake.

"Mebbe so, but there ain't no one around, and I doubt it anyway. The whole hill's gravel."

"Yeah, but see those dozer marks? They've sure enough pushed it up here for sumpthin'!" Jake voiced his fears.

"Well, let's hurry and load this then," said Tom. They shoveled intermittently for about ten minutes, until a black car came down the road. Then they both threw down their shovels like guilty boys and leaned against the truck trying to appear nonchalant. The car slowed down past them but didn't stop.

Shaken by their imagined brush with authority, they climbed back into the truck and once more drove into the gravel pit. This time Tom shut the gate behind them so anyone driving by could not tell it had been entered.

Jake parked the truck by a slope of gravel and shut off the motor. "Sure as hell takin' us long enough to get a load of gravel. Jeez, it's hot." He pulled out a sack of tobacco. They rested a while, feeling secure from prying eyes in the deep gravel pit.

"Don't know how you can chew that stuff when it's so hot," said Tom.

"All the better then." Jake spat and then said. "Well,

we won't get done settin' here." They climbed out and took up their shovels again, and heaved sand for another five minutes, but the mound of sand they had made thus far was puny in the wide, flat truck bed. Jake looked wistfully at the tractor and scoop as he lifted his slouchy hat to allow the air to cool his sweating forehead. "Wonder if we could get that thing started?" he said half to himself.

"What if someone'd come, though?" said Tom in the same kind of voice. They walked over to the tractor and looked at the switches and controls that ran the motor and scoop. Tom gave up after pulling and pushing a few of them, but Jake, on the tractor, pushed a projection with his foot and the motor turned over. "Hell, if we can find the fuel lever we're in!" he said. By following the rod that led to the carburetor they soon found the desired control, and Jake pulled it wide open and shoved hard on the starter. It didn't start the first time and Tom said, "D'ya know how to run this thing anyway, Jake?"

Jake sat on the tractor awkwardly, because the crew evidently had taken the leather seat with them out of the weather, and Jake had to sit on the metal transmission plate. He said, "Sure I do, used to run one sumpthin' like this." Tom doubted if he had, but it didn't make much difference--Jake would try it anyway. He was that way.

The next time the motor caught and bellowed a cloud of black smoke and a noise so loud and fearsome that Tom felt it

could be heard twenty miles to the county seat and by the county engineer, who watched over the county's equipment.

Jake grinned juicely down at him and experimented with the controls of the scoop, raising it up and down, catching and releasing the shovel. With the crawler in the lowest gear he approached the gravel bank and clumsily got a little sand in the scoop. The first time he pulled a wrong lever and dumped out what little he had picked up. Rather enjoying the whole thing, Jake cursed loudly for his own amusement. Working the levers as if he didn't have enough hands, he again engaged the gravel bank with his scoop and came away with it almost half full. Luckily the forward and back gears were plainly marked, so Jake didn't have too much trouble braking the tractor around and heading toward the truck bed. He rammed it only slightly, and dumped most of the sand in the box.

When he saw the quantity of sand that thumped on the bed, making the springs complain, Tom lost much of his apprehension about getting caught and jumped up to throw out lumps of clay and rocks that were too big.

"Hell, this is goin' to be a breeze," he shouted at Jake, whom he knew could not hear him. They filled the truck bed full enough with the third scoop, which Jake had managed to get almost full. Tom, beside the tractor, shouted to Jake it was enough and went on "D'ya suppose we ought to leave this runnin'? Might not be able to get it started again."

"Hell, I can start this crate in my sleep," shouted back Jake, and the last three words stood out very loudly because he cut the motor mid-way in his exclamation. He jumped down and walked around the front of the tractor. It was then they discovered one of the lift arms had been leaking hydraulic oil badly around the seal. It was evident that the damage was not new, however, because Tom noticed a five-gallon can of oil tied conveniently to the front of the tractor.

"Look at that! This county equipment is just no damn good. It's a cinch we didn't do it," he said. "See that can of oil? They probably just fill 'er up again after it all drains out."

Jake asked Tom and himself, "D'ya suppose we oughta put some back in it before we leave?"

"Might not be a bad idea. We oughta drive it back over where it was sittin', too, in case someone comes while we're gone." So they located the oil spout, after Jake had convinced Tom they didn't put it in the motor of the tractor, and put in a couple of quarts of oil from the can. "That's about what we lost," said Tom confidently to the older man. "Why don't you start it up and drive it back where it was now, and I'll scuff some sand over this we spilled."

Jake agreed it would be a good idea, so he cranked up the red machine and ran it back to its original position, running over the five-gallon can of oil in the process, crushing

it flat.

"Jeez Chris', now look what you done!" Tom cursed the older man when he had shut off the motor. First Jake, then Tom, following the contagious action of his elder, looked around the rim of the pit to see whether they were still unseen. Then Jake blurted a chuckle. "Gimme a shovel, I'll bury the can over there." Tom, a little scared, handed him a shovel and then kicked layers of light-covered, dry sand over the darkened soaked spots and streaks where the oil had splattered when the can popped. Then he laughed, too.

The truck groaned as they circled up and out of the pit, around the bridge detour and back to the place. Tom and Jake were both in pretty good spirits now, happily considering the gains their work would probably bring them from Forrest. Funny, because he'd never know how easy it really had been.

"You see, Jake," Tom said, "We might get a raise next month or a day off, and at the least the old man will be a little better about lettin' us quit early Saturday nights or gettin' us up so damned early."

"Yeah, sure could stand a raise."

The truck had a dump bed and the load of gravel was quickly scattered along a part of the drive in loose piles which Tom knocked down with his shovel. Jake mostly just used his for a leaning post.

"D'ya know it's way past bean time already?" Jake

questioned Tom.

"Probably is. Let's eat before we do any more." And they both threw down their shovels on the spot.

"You know, that old Austin's gonna have to quit giving us hell all the time, too, if the old man starts noticing how good we're working on our own," Tom was saying as they went to eat.

After dinner the two loafed around until nearly 2:30, convincing themselves that with the tractor at their convenience they would finish the enterprise in a matter of minutes. When they finally did come out of their shade they were greeted by a steaming-hot sun.

"Jeez Chris', it's hot!" complained Tom.

"De hottah de sun shine, de bettah ah feels," lied Jake in dialect, and they both laughed.

As they went down the new soft road and around the bridge detour this time, a new problem confronted them. A man was busying himself officially on the cement skeleton of the new bridge. The gravel pit was hardly a quarter-mile away, so that if they entered it they could not possibly go undetected. They drove past the bridge, up to the gate, and stopped. They could look down and see the man's car and watch his actions.

"Now what'n the hell is he doin' out here today, anyhow?" asked Tom.

"Looks like he's watering down that green concrete,"

replied Jake. "When it's this hot, you can't let it dry too fast or it'll crack."

"How long ya suppose it'll take him? We can't wait all day."

"Dunno. Looks like he's got his wife with him. See down there by the creek?"

"Yeah. Probably go fishing while they're at it," said Tom, disgustedly.

"Hell, com'on, let's go talk to him," said Jake.

"What good's that goin' to do?" queried Tom, but he knew that Jake would do it anyhow.

At the bridge they pulled up and stopped behind his car. When they got out, Tom noticed there was a girl by the creek, too. Whe was wearing red shorts and looked damned attractive to him, and he was suddenly conscious of all his movements. She straightened and looked at them but quickly turned away. Tom thought, "Probably don't think much of these dirty work clothes I'm wearing." He brushed his pants and straightened his shirt. "Bet if she could see how I looked cleaned up, she'd pay a little more attention." Then Tom noticed he had a big spot of mud that stiffened the cloth from his knee to his ankle. He decided she was a little too young, anyway, and climbed the ladder over which Jake had already disappeared.

Jake was a little awkward on the narrow walk-ways, and Tom caught up with him before he got to the man on the middle

section of the bridge. The man waved a hello to them when he first saw them and stood self-consciously, judging when they would be close enough to talk without shouting. But Jake started right out.

"Say," he shouted, "We were goin' to haul a little gravel, and we were wonderin' if that pile up there was goin' to be used for anything in particular?" His voice at the end was finally in a normal tone as he approached the man.

"Yeah, I think so," the man replied. "I don't have anything to do with the road gang's work, but I think they pushed it up there to load from for the roads."

"Well, we was just wonderin'. Kinda looked like that, so we thought we'd ask. Got to haul a little gravel today."

"Yeah, Well, I don't know, but I suppose it'd be all right to go down into the gravel pit and get some. That is, if the landowner didn't object. I guess it's his gravel, after all, and he's only selling it to the county."

"Well," said Jake, "don't think Sam'd care. We're neighbors. . . live right over there," and Jake pointed to the big stone house and spic-and-span farm of Forrest.

The man seemed to warm to them a little then, and Jake led the conversation into other channels, talking of the weather and the man's job with apparent interest. Finally he heaved a sigh and said, "Well, boy, guess we might just as well get started. Hot as it is, though, I sure hate to think about

shoveling that." Jake turned partly away and surveyed what they could see of the pit.

"Well . . ." said the county can. "I think the crew left a scoop down there in the pit. How many loads you expect to get?"

"Oh, just a couple," said Tom quickly before he realized that Jake would have answered but was just taking his time about it, thinking over the offer.

"Well, if you can get it started, suppose it would be all right to use it." Feeling as if he had said too much already, the man added, "I really don't have anything to do with it, though."

"Well, thanks a lot!" exclaimed Jake. "Sure will save us a lot of work."

"That's okay," said the man. "But don't get me in dutch. If someone comes by don't tell them I told you to go ahead and use it, because like I said, I haven't really got anything . . ."

Jake and Tom assented and laughed humorlessly as the situation demanded they should. "Hell," Jake said to Tom later. "We don't know his name anyhow." This time they laughed with humor at the man whose name they didn't know.

So they went back to the gravel pit and loaded again. Tom laughed to himself about the admirable way that Jake ha handled the situation, and looked at Jake as he worked the controls of the crawler with something of a swagger, if that was

possible in his awkward position without a seat on the transmission plate.

When they had loaded they drove back past the bridge, waving at the man on the bridge as they went by. "Bet he'd split a blood vessel if he knew we'd already got one load and saw how you fooled him, Jake." Jake greeted Tom's words with proud guffaws.

They dumped the load and were back in just a few minutes for their third. The man at the bridge was just getting ready to leave. Sitting straight in the new truck, Tom looked for the girl, but he couldn't see her.

Back at the pit Jake had a little trouble starting the tractor, but he finally got it running. As he loaded the scoop, Tom noted that Jake rammed the gravel bank with real force and handled the controls like a professional catskinner. Except he was just a little clumsy, not having that seat and having either to sit on the floor or half-stand. Tom thought about asking Jake to let him try it. Then Jake, swinging around with a scoopfull of sand, motioned for him to move the truck foreward so it would be easier for him to dump. Tom forgot his thoughts for a moment and moved the truck as Jake indicated.

Tom guessed that Jake either couldn't release the clutch or his foot slipped off one of the brakes, because the other brake caught hard. It swung the scoop on the front of the tractor in an arc that included the truck's front fender. Tom

jammed hard on the truck's brakes, but it was too late. There was a neat crease in the right fender that was just deep enough not to tear through the metal skin but still enough to give an accordian effect. There was a reverent silence for about thirty seconds while both men surveyed the damage.

"Now we gotta do a good job on that graveling, or we're gonna catch hell!" said Tom in a hushed voice.

Jake ran his finger down the crease, "Gawddamn sonofa-bitchin' clutch!"

"Well, remember how beat-up the old truck was when Forrest traded it off for this one?" asked Tom. "He never said much about that."

"Yeah, but this one is new!"

"Not so new," replied Tom, "bout time it was showing some use." He hoped Jake wouldn't attack his idea of graveling the drive and blame him for all the trouble they'd been having. He went on. "We can pound it out a little when we get home. Won't look too bad."

"Yeah, but you know how the old man always likes to have everything look so damned good."

Tom seized upon the opening. "So let's finish this job and get those chucks filled. Might at least help us a little now." The possibilities of gain from their venture had taken on a considerably different light. "Start this thing up for me and I'll finish loading this load," commanded Tom of Jake.

"Mebbe this load will finish it."

"No, you better let me finish. It takes quite a while to get the feel of it, 'specially without a seat." But Tom was steadfast. He had been wanting to run it anyhow.

So Jake started the motor and jumped down from the tractor as Tom climbed up. Damned if he was going to show Tom how to run it; if he wanted to do it so bad, let him find out for himself.

Tom soon realized maybe he shouldn't have been so hasty about wanting to run the scoop. Jake had begun to make it look easy, but now he was as clumsy as Jake had been to begin with. Or even worse. "Mebbe Jake had run one of these before," he thought. "Ain't as easy as it looks." But Tom was a little mad at Jake now, so he didn't show his doubts. In fact, after he got started, he did pretty well, and with the second try got an almost-full scoop. He lifted the scoop almost as high as it would go before he backed away from the bank, but it wouldn't go too high because one of the lift arms had lost a lot of oil again. It sagged a little.

Starting forward, Tom put the crawler in a fast gear, because the truck was a little ways off and he wanted to show off a little to Jake. Because the scoop was so high, Tom thought about stopping to lower it before he got to the truck. "Let's see, though, It's this lever right here. I'll lower it while I'm moving and show Jake just how damn good I can run this

thing. Almost a full load already." He pushed the lever all the way in the "down" position. Noticing how fast it was falling, he pulled the lever in a little panic clear back to the "up" position. The sudden stop of the heavy scoop caused the little crawler to buck violently and suddenly, throwing Tom off balance and jerking his hands off the levers. In fact, it was worse than that. Tom grabbed the accelerator lever as he fell. It was all that saved him from falling off, but it sent the crawler at full speed toward Jake, who ran out of the way, leaving a clear path broadside at the truck.

The scoop caught the truck just at the top of the outside dual tire. The outer tire blew out with a sudden noise and the scoop continued, hitting under and on the truck bed, bending and splintering and twisting the truck nearly half over before the momentum of the tractor stopped and the motor died. Then the weight of the truck rolled the tractor slowly backward until the truck rested lightly on the uninjured tire.

It was awful damned quiet for a while. Finally Jake moved to start the tractor to back it away from the truck and Tom jumped down, plenty willing to let Jake take the controls.

They didn't say anything as they drove out of the gravel pit. Tom slowly and carefully shut the gate with the sign that said No Trespassing. As the truck limped slowly homeward over the soft road Tom said, "Where do you figure on goin', Jake?"

Jake meditated a long while and replied. "Got a cousin

near Fort Bluff. Heard they need help there. Guess that's where I'll head."

"How far away is that?" questioned Tom.

"Two hunnerd, two-fifty," came the reply. Tom was silent, seeming to be asking himself if that was far enough.

"What'er they doin'?"

"Berry season, 'bout now, I guess."

"Jeez, that's hard work."

They were both silent as Jake herded the truck into Forrest's machine shed and cut the motor. They walked together to get their things, Tom with head down, thinking.

"Well," Tom's voice almost quavered with the fear that Jake might be angry at him and refuse what he was going to ask. "Jake, would it be all right if I went with you that far? Mebbe your cousin knows someplace I can go from there."

"Sure, boy," replied Jake. "Yer young to be headin' out with no place to go to. We'll make good money pickin' berries, too."

Tom kicked at a pile of new, soft gravel in the drive and tried not to show his gratitude.

V. THE AFTERNOON OF PROFESSOR BARCARI

"Petey!" the voice shouted.

Petey's elbows gripped his sides, and his breath jerked in. He hated his father. Every time he heard his father yell his name, Petey's heart beat faster in fear. Hated his old man. Made him scared as a kid just by saying his name. He didn't see how his mother could like his father so much.

"Petey!" bellowed his father a second time.

"What?" answered Petey as defiantly as he dared, running into the kitchen.

"Why haven't you cleaned up those branches like I told you? Now get out there! Lazy kids nowadays . . . get a little work and it acts like it kills you."

"I just got home," said Petey, looking at his mother, pleading for the affirmation she usually gave him.

She turned from the stove. "Well, you've made plenty of mess in the front room already," his mother said tonelessly. "You can dump that trash for me when you're through," she added.

"Be a crime if I ever had a minute for myself," thought Petey as he stamped out the door, thinking of his half-completed balsa airplane. He dragged branches to the incinerator back of the garage. They wouldn't fit, so he threw them down disgustedly beside it.

"Old man always yelling about working. Thinks I'm

a lousy no-good. Now Mom don't like me either." He slammed into the kitchen, got some matches and the trash, and went out again. He dumped the trash and used some of the papers to carefully start the branches on fire. The pile was high as Petey himself; he did the lighting expertly, like a trapper or a scout. He blew on the flames to drive them back into the paper and branches, and they caught. He watched the flames as they wilted some of the greener limbs.

When his interest wandered, he turned away. Back in the kitchen, he looked at his mother. "Don't track," was all she said.

Daddy wasn't in the house, and he went quickly to the table full of airplane ribs, paper, and glue which was hardening uselessly in the cup and drying on unstuck joints. Some of them he'd have to do over now. He reglued and weighted a joint he had been working on. Then Petey took a rubber band and slipped it around the tail section to hold the fresh ribs in place. He poured the unused glue, already stiff, into the jar and set the cap on just a half-turn.

Petey's twelve-year-old chin was set, disgusted to have to stop in the middle of something he wanted to do just because his old man was in a bad mood.

He heard his dad out front and hurriedly placed the parts in a box and slammed it in the closet.

As Petey started into the kitchen, he heard his dad

scream, "Hey! Betty! Betty!" His mother dropped a pan and clattered out the back door. "Get the hose around here!" He raged at her. Petey saw smoke billowing beside the garage and his father pulling at the pile of branches. Petey ran to his mother and grabbed at the end of the plastic hose, but she shoved him aside so hard he fell.

Petey's lower lip began to curl and his eyes pinched, but his father's yelling brought him to his feet.

"Now where in the hell have you been?" he yelled as Petey ran to the garage. He could see his father was holding a burned hand and was kicking wood farther away from the scorched and blackened garage wall. Angrily he grabbed the hose from his wife and it banged against Petey as he pulled it toward the garage. The water put the fire out quickly.

"Now come here, you damn' brat," he grated as he grabbed Petey and lashed him with a stinging green switch. Petey screamed in pain, anger, and frustration.

"Mama! Mama!" he begged shrieking. His father threw down the switch and grabbed his blistered hand again.

"You baby him after this and I'll swat you, too," he yelled in pain at his already crying wife.

"Frank!" she wailed as she fled into the house after her husband. Petey blubbered to her, but she gave him a hateful look and slammed the door. Petey howled in a screaming pitch, then mourned until the sobbing died away somewhat. He got up

and stumbled away, blubbering. He probed his aching hurts. The more that he thought about it, the sorrier he felt for himself.

Two blocks away he stopped and slumped to the curb. It was quiet and the afternoon sun was warm. He sniffed in a gasp of air and grunted it out, letting it shake his body in a sob. "Bastard old man. Wish he was dead. Never liked me, and now Mom's just as bad. Nobody. Don't know why I couldn't have a decent father."

Petey noticed after a while that there was a crowd of people in the next vacant lot, and he ran the backs of his hands across his cheeks. He looked back at his house. Then he walk- to a place separated from the people and sat on the ground.

In the front of the people was a brightly costumed pair of men just like those he'd seen at a carnival once. There was a girl, and a man was yelling at th top of his voice," . . . invented by this man. The Greatest and Most Efficient use of Any engine ever known to man . . . he will Astound you by taking off from where he stands now and performing feats that you have only Dreamed of . . . Ladies and Gentlemen, this genius was paid the sum of One-Half Million Dollars by a big business firm I cannot mention Not to produce for sale the amazing device You are about to see . . ."

He continued in a booming monotone, punctuated by shouted words. "Professor Barcari gives these demonstrations Only

because he Loves to, and you will understand Why a man would love it when you see his aerial grace and Freedom. If you would please donate what you would Care To Give to show your appreciation to the professor for bringing this demonstration to you, we will proceed . . ."

One of the men passed through the people, arguing with some who kept their hands in their pockets, but Petey's attention was drawn to the other man in the center of the lot. With something now strapped to his back, he was standing aloof, concerned only with himself. He was good-looking and very special, you could tell. He bent his knees and sprang easily into the air!

Petey glanced over his shoulder, but could see no one around his house. He looked back and the flying man was circling above the lot. From his own vantage away from the people, Petey noticed the people's heads circling, too, awed by the things happening here. He could see it all without moving his head. The man did a double loop and ended with a swooping dive. With freedom and ease he slide-slipped and flew upside down. He flipped aerial cartwheels, looped and dived. Petey could feel the flying himself, just watching him.

The man settled slowly to the ground, and there was a tremendous noise of clapping hands. Skillfully he tied a line to himself and connected it to his younger and smaller partner. Their shadows were long and lean from the rays of the setting

sun. He took off again, his arms stretched gracefully, now followed by the other, smaller flyer in the same posture. Together they circled like birds, connected by their thin line. They swooped and soared together. The graceful and amazing professor Barcari turned and smiled at the smaller figure flying with him. Petey could feel how much fun it was to be towed along with him and take the smooth curves and glides. They settled to the ground, finally, and Barcari shook the younger man's hand and told him how well he had done. The crowd milled around, talking excitedly and congratulating the pair.

During the confusion a girl with the troupe took off a cloak and began to talk to the crowd. They quieted instantly, and she walked among them with her bare legs, collecting money again. Petey looked towards his house but his mother wasn't in sight. She started toward Petey and he watched her bare legs moving. Her clothes were pretty tight and her breasts pushed out. She moved very close to him. "Hello, Petey," she said. He twisted and looked again; his mother still was not looking for him. "Well, I'll show her . . ." He turned, tightened his lips, and stood up. He looked down at the girl's beautiful face and her body. The two of them were nearly touching. "Hello," said Petey boldly.

She stayed with him and didn't go back to the other people.

"How come you came way over here?" Petey asked.

"I don't know. I saw you over here, I guess." Her name was . . . Marietta, and she smiled at him. Petey took her hand and pulled her down beside him like the couples he'd read about. Mom didn't like him reading that kind of books.

He told the girl all about how he was going to fly his own plane. Pretty soon the sun had gone down and the lot was all shadowy. The crowd was all gone. But he had the girl beside him; he guessed he'd put his arm around her. She would be warm and full of fire.

Then Petey heard his mother's voice, and he forgot about the girl for a minute. He looked levelly at his mother coming up the sidewalk from the house.

From half-a-block away his mother pleaded, "Petey! Come home, honey!" She sounded worried.

Petey ran down the walk to meet his mother. "Where have you been?" his mother scolded sympathetically, and laid her arm on his shoulders. Petey looked back at the vacant lot. It was cold and bare and empty.

VI. STATE FAIR REVUE

"God!" said Lex disgustedly. "I sure can pick 'em." He stamped into the living room and threw down his paper without reading it. After his wife's dirty-mouthed tirade this morning she was giving him the silent treatment tonight, answering him only flatly and coldly or not at all.

"Your supper's on the table," she said now as she passed the door, somehow making the plain statement sound sarcastic. She was dressed to go out somewhere, but she wasn't going to say anything, and damned if he'd ask where she was going. The door slammed firmly behind her.

"What a bitch she turned out to be," he thought. "Can't live with her." All he asked was a couple of hours of peace when he came home at night without her nagging about chores he could do and bothering him with her troubles when he had enough of his own. And this morning . . . what a stupid thing to blow up about. Wasn't he entitled to have a good breakfast ready in his own house when he wanted it?

After a while his anger ebbed, and he was only infinitely sad that things had to be the way they turned out. What a farce their marriage was! Wasn't he entitled to a little happiness? Seemed to him that half the marriages he knew of must have been arranged by some satyr that laughed at the misery caused in the lives of men doomed to live with the wrong choices. Life was a chain; changing the smallest link might have changed everything. Probably if he got up now and

moved to that other chair, following events might be different than if he remained slouched in the one he now occupied. Lex stretched his lungs with a great ball of air and heaved it out. Predestination hadn't bothered him since he had puzzled it as a teenager.

Well, if he could have changed anything, he wished he'd walked on sidewalk cracks instead of skipping over them when he was young and worried about the superstition. Is there only one woman that can make a man happy? And was he missing that one chance, sure to have misery? Or is the matching only caused by time and events, geared so that if one cog should slip in the synchronization of time, environment, place, and situation the whole thing was lost?

No, by heaven! He had had a chance. There had been a girl--a perfect, perfect girl-and no other words could describe her. Lex realized again the happiness he could have had, and now he remembered it as he always did, with a sweet, dark pain deep in him as he probed the frustrating events that kept them apart. He could no longer bring her image, but he remembered how she looked--long, not-quite-blonde hair--perfection in body and feature. She was the most perfect creature he had ever seen, and he wasn't alone in his judgment. She had come down the midway where Lex had seen her first: alone, sparkling, and followed by damn near every sailor and gaping teen-age boy who caught sight of her. They were just gazing awestruck by

her; she was the kind of beauty you saw in a crowd and guessed you'd probably never see again.

She was on the midway at the state fair where Lex had worked for six straight years, since he was 13, in a commercial advertising display. Each succeeding year the smell of the carnival, the dirt, the slick-handed ex-cons in their gyp stands, the din, and the milling people who were only markos for the carnies became more and more unpleasant to him. He guessed it was the smell that got him the most. Lex grinned as he lived the days over again: "Maybe I just have an oversensitive nose. No one else has ever mentioned a carnival smelling!" But few people really noticed the carnival as he did. Perspiration, smoke, the smell of trampled dust, a special tang from the tents of winos and freaks, filthy food stands, and dozens of other odors mingled and gave the carnival a special smell all its own, distinctive and disagreeable. It never changed, though the faces of the carnie operators changed almost every year. Lex hated the faceless, senseless carnival crowds.

Even so, a few of the attractions still excited him. He hadn't been on the midway all week until that day when he wandered down it, shouldering his way through and feeling much apart from the crowds. He always felt a thrill when a band swept through the midway, clearing the jumbled crowd with its well-ordered prancing lines and stirring music. Lex leaned

back on a skillo stand and watched the strutting majorettes, and remained leaning there even after the sound of the progressing band was swallowed in the reviving din. And, leaning there, he saw Betty--confident, sparkling, soft and perfect. Her name hadn't suited her, not even a little bit, and though he always kidded her and told her he was going to think of another one for her, he never found one that fit or sounded like her.

Lex didn't think she could possibly have noticed him as she went by, but later when she chanced to meet him at his display (if that hadn't been fate, what then?), she turned to him with recoginition in her voice and picquant look. "Why, hello!" she said, and her eyes turned to softness a man who thought he'd been around and was wiser and stronger in the ways of women than his nineteen years would warrant. Lex tried to finish writing the list he w s holding as he talked to her, but he found that his hands were not obeying him and his fingers were nervous and clumsy. He knew he was not a strikingly handsome figure, but as much as he was attracted to her he sensed unbelievingly but certainly a similar feeling in her for him.

And if he had not believed it then, succeeding events would surely have proved it to him. Although Lex couldn't understand it, he accepted her adoration of him as if it were a phantasy too wonderful to doubt. She had led him to a

darkened parking lot even that first night to say goodnight, and as she pressed herself against him he knew a girl like her could only be acting like this because she really went for him.

But in those four days he came to know her as a girl who didn't try to put herself over with beauty alone, as so many with that asset might have. She had a vibrant personality and endless drive and ambition, making existence a wonderful thing instead of scanning it for beauty already there. With her Lex became a part of that senseless, giddy, swirling carnival crowd. He lived with a bouyant bubble always in him, and loved her with an exciting and awesome love in the great dark grandstand after the gay lighted splendor of the State Fair Revue. He adored her in the crowds as they laughed together. He pulled her into corners for quick yielding kisses only yards from shoving hundreds; they laughed together as they rocked a "wheel" seat 200 feet above the lights and pandemonium--and became silent together as they breathed the high, cool air of night and looked far across glittering lights and displays and colors to the distant closeness of a moon and stars as they can only be in September.

Lex never felt as if he were all there unless she was beside him, and as for her--she showed in a thousand little ways, as only a woman can do, her adoration of Lex. He had

never been so confident or happy. If he could capture a perfect woman like this, there was nothing he couldn't do! A lifetime with her would be ridiculously perfect. She made him whole, and if ever a woman was made for a man, she was made for him. And she even said she could never be happy again without him. Neither of them had talked of the future, though. "That's because," thought Lex, "I didn't say anything about it, and she was waiting for me to be the one to say it." He planned to ask her on their final day. As for now, in the short times they were apart, they planned only where they would next meet, because this made every outing an adventurous gambol.

It seemed impossible that they should ever have become separated. When she hadn't shown up at the lunch counter where they often met, Lex didn't realize for over an hour that they had decided to go on to their seats in the grandstand for the revue. "Darn it," Lex said, "how could I forget?" And he ran to the grandstand anticipating the laughing greeting he would get for his foolish error.

Lex looked at the seat where she had been perhaps only seconds before, but the bare seat only stared back, its emptiness echoing the emptiness he suddenly felt. He ran from the grandstand, past displays that were suddenly very tired-looking, and sorted the milling faces. Once he thought he saw her, and gladness was almost hurting him inside, but

some other girl turned startled at his touch. He tried to run through the crowds, but the milling last-day mob buffeted and pushed him back. At his own display, finally, he found out, "Yea, she was here lookin' for you. Say, she looked like one sad girl when she left! What you been up to, Lex?" The man sniggered.

He went to where she had been staying, although he knew she was supposed to have checked out that morning. "No, she hasn't been back here since this morning," the curious clerk said.

"Naw, don't remember any tricksie like that in particular," echoed Maisie tiredly at the lunch counter. When Lex remembered she lived with a married sister whose name he didn't know, he wandered urgently but aimlessly. And when he thought about how impossible it all was, he even cried a little to himself.

Finally it was Thursday. The state fair was over, the crowds were gone, and only Lex wandered where they had been. There were no lights, no gaiety, no barking carnies: none of the color of yesterday. The stands stood all covered with dirty canvas and the paved ways were solid with dirt and paper and trinkets that remained. Lex couldn't remember that he had ever been able to see all the way down the midway before. Now he stood alone and looked down it, and it looked stark and ugly. A wind flipped a swirl of dust all the way

down its emptiness. A band had come down this way and a girl had happily followed it--a girl who said she could never be happy without him.

Finally Lex knew that it was time to give up, and he turned and wandered back through the half-mile of squalid, still carnival machines. He looked at the grandstand, and it yawned back at him with its empty seats. There were no people, but the familiar sweet sickening smell of the carnival was still there.

If there was a single person on the carnival grounds as Lex wandered through and out the big auto gate on the west side, he never noticed him. Lex wandered out, and he had been wandering ever since--his wanderings had brought him slouched in this chair often, and to this sadness he often felt.

He had accepted because there was nothing else he could do. Now he knew that even though everything else would always taste bitter because he had tasted sweetness, he probably had to live his life this way. Only one thing made it possible for him to stick it. He knew that somewhere, in some circumstance, there was a perfect and beautiful woman with long, not-quite-blonde hair. She would also never be able to be happy again from having been too happy once, and would always feel that the only one who really fitted with her would never be there.

And Betty Shellen, in a city hardly more than a hundred miles away, sat on the arm of her husband's chair. She bent her head with its cap of close-cropped, not-quite-blonde hair over her husband, and in a thousand little ways--as only a woman can do--she showed him how much she loved him.

"I see in the paper," he declared, "that this year's state fair opens next week. Always thought I'd like to go. Maybe see one of those grandstand shows. Like to go?"

"Might be fun, honey," she replied. "Did I ever tell you I worked as a junior model at a home ec clothing exhibit one year? Can you imagine me?" she laughed.

He replied of course he could, but she was thinking of that state fair week. Hadn't thought of that in a long time . . . it had been fun. And that guy she had picked up . . . Larry, she thought his name was . . . did he ever go overboard! The money he spent! He sure turned out to be a mooning . . . Her husband interrupted her. "What ya thinking about, baby?" he asked.

She laughed at herself and her thoughts. "Oh, a boy I knew once who thought he was a man," she said. "Let me tell you about a real character!"

And she laughed again as she told of the antics of a guy who really burned when she lit a little spark--Larry, she thought his name was.

VII. REFLECTIONS IN THE SKY

Dark, pungent oil comes pulsing from the ground in steel arteries to be settled into wooden gunbarrel tanks. Its lighter, purer parts drain into other squatter tanks to be trucked and piped away. As the gunbarrel gradually fills, a greasy-clothed pumper turns a valve and the waste, salt water, and settlings pour into a shallow, broad pool where the wastes evaporate or seep away--sometimes years later to mix with the cold underground, sweet water, causing cattle to go thirsty and drinkers from wells to spit the acidy salt taste that coats the tongue.

When the slush pit contents have receded and the thick, paraffin-and-tar blackness threatens to coat and seal the bot-- tom of the pool, the pumper lights a match. A gust of flame-laced, sooty cloud thrusts skyward, its boiling denseness and changing shape a fascinating study of motion. But the oil campers' wives watch the clouds in order to rush out to gather clothes from under their sooty fall-out.

In the first heat that can be oppressive in Kansas even in early June, farmers up and down the Saline River valley send echoing ribbons of smoke skyward. They are burning off shocks of fodder left from the winter's feeding. Plows are already opening long, dark gashes in the winter-settled moist soil, and wheeling hundreds of gulls with graceful quiet wingings settle to pick the new-dug treasures.

Ferd Meuller in the heat and wind was perspiration-caked with grime from dust piled around the sorghum butts that he and his sons had been stacking all day. They had to shake each bundle as it was pried from the ground to rid it of its weight of winter-collected dust. Ferd had rows of stacks of the nearly-worthless stuff--six blackened and weathered ones from previous years and already two great new yellow-brown ones stretching fifty feet long and thirty high. Each new spring was an impending drought for him, and he frugally saved each dry stalk, even after grain had been threshed from it.

It was true that Ferd and his boys ran instead of walking in their work. The lease-hound from Pinion watched them as they worked, shaking his head over the fact that any man could or would or must attack his work with such compulsion. They had seen him drive up, of course, but Ferd didn't come down from the wagon to speak to him e en when he walked close to where Ferd was working and watched until he had enough of the dirt sifting down. A little embarrassed because no-one paid attention to him, he waited in the car, feeling out of place where a day's work was attacked with so severity of purpose. When the wagon was empty and only then Ferd came to talk and the rest rushed to get another load. Rangey in overalls, craggy of face, with a hawk nose that swooped over a dust-colored moustache, Ferd roared from out of conversing range while Jack got out of the car.

"Well, dit you bring your pitchfork and gloves?" he asked, creasing his face in shrewd-smile lines.

"How are you, Mr. Meuller," replied Jack. "Purty hot work today, isn't it?"

"We're gettin' along," said Ferd with the barest touch of German accent. "What d'ya need today?" He beat his dusty cap on his leg. Jack explained that he had a company interested in a location on Ferd's land and spread a map over the hood of the car and talked about highs, geological slips, and structure breaks as he pointed to well producing adjacent and farther away.

"Four dry holes already," Ferd said. "Don't you think they'd give ub? My land is going to be like a sieve."

"It's here someplace, Ferd, and they think this is the place." Jack pointed to a red-circled location.

The dusty man's face was inscrutable. He watched his boys loading the wagon with its dry burden across the field. With his mouth he pulled down one corner of his moustache.

"Dollar and a half for thad half-section," he demanded in a quiet statement. "I want two hundred for surface damage if they drill in the wheat field." He had leased his land many times.

"That sounds okay, Mr. Meuller." The clean and cool lease-hound was now business-like and somehow patronizing. I'll get those papers out for you wife and you to sign in the

morning." He straightened his tie. "Would you like a cold beer?"

Ferd glanced into the back seat of the car. Beside some expensive and well-used fishing equipment was a large portable cooler. Probably full, thought Ferd, but he said, "Work won't get done by itself," and he smiled with his mouth and stuck out his work-hardened hand for a final handshake.

As the car blew a flume of dust behind it out of the field, the graying man took a drink from the sun-warmed water jug near the stack and trotted down the rows to the already nearly-filled wagon.

Harvest time blazed and blew typically Kansas. The pressures of time and short favorable weather could do little to speed Meuller's usual frenzied pace, but they served to antagonize him against breakdowns, slow-ups, and his harvest hands. Always stern, a "typical German" according to his neighbors, he tonguelashed and regimented his sons like machines to be managed. There was no praise, only blame. To no-one did Ferd show the softer emotions related to wealth and leisure, although his land holdings were considered large. There was a mortgage that weighed like Sisyphus' stone against his straining shoulders. But his near-grown sons cried out with pain and frustration in their throats, "Damned old fool. He must love it. He don't know anything but work. What's the use of working yourself to death and never stopping to enjoy life?"

Two combines cut a 16-foot swath through pregnant, drooping heads. When this field was finished, trucks would move the timbers, tanks, pipe and cable already piled beside the gate into the firld. A waving red flag showed the location stake.

Standing on the combine, raising and lowering the height of the cutting platform, in front of his wheel like the pilot of a ship looking over his own dusty, golden waves, Ferd mopped his dripping forehead and thought. A river under this field, thousands of feet below this dusty, poor topsoil. There could be. A black river. How was it, downward? His stolid posture didn't show his muscles tense as he tried to feel what was here, to perceive, to know. But his eyes wandered across the valley where derricks thrust their skeleton frames against the horizon and oily smoke created artificial storm clouds in the sky. His son on the crawler tractor turned him, braking around a corner parallel to the beating slats of the cutting platform. Itchy, chaffy dust billowed around him, and he tried to keep from breathing. It settled down his neck and mixed with perspiration. A hill of flying ants swarming up from the sudden intrusion, settled on him, crawling under his hat band. "Gott damn it, wind and dirt," muttered Ferd through teeth clenched against the air he must breathe.

Early September evenings were already brisk and nippy. In the clearness of the cool air Ferd could hear the hollow,

hissing roar of the unused gas piped off the Langdon wells. He sat in the early darkness on the steps of his home eating an apple. He had left the supper table--it had been quiet as usual, but he had thundered no curses about the day's work nor had he given any orders about the next day's. The sons and Ferd's wife, Martha, had all glanced at him, trying to read his feelings, but he seemed not to notice. They were thinking about the same thing, but nobody spoke about what was on his mind. The last month the well had dominated all their thoughts and activities. Ferd looked at the apple in his hand and grunted. Gott, how he hoped the well came in! Even Martha these last years was becoming hard, quiet, and stingy. Locking up apples so the boys wouldn't get at them, parcelling them out one at a time! Not the way things should be . . . could be. Paul is going to leave home, I know. Know the boys don't like me, being so hard on them. Won't hurt them, ever, but they hate it . . . me. Don't need to think I like it either! Work like an animal to stay caught up, never get anywhere ahead.

He knew what Paul wanted most of all was to go to college. "If the well comes in, I'll send him!" he suddenly decided. "He could go this year, yet. We could get a couple of hired hands, take it a little easier." He knew how life could be lived, no matter what they thought. Take the weekends off, get Martha a few nice things for a change. He'd like to travel, himself . . . hadn't had a vacation in his life. He knew

what his family felt like, but it wasn't because he didn't want better things for them. He did understand. Why, he'd send Paul to college even if the well didn't come in!

He stood, hands stuck deep in his pockets, thinking how he could bring warmth back to his hardened family. In the strong profile bowed in the moonlight the moustache somehow very much belonged. But it was a face no longer unreadable in its need.

He went to the truck in what was almost a nightly ritual now that the well was in the last week of drilling. As Ferd drove slowly across the pasture and field to the light-dancing rig, he shut off his lights. In the bright moonlight the wheel-ruts were clear, and he knew every pot-hole in his land without looking anyhow. Mist hanging over the whitened grass was a flood of water lapping at the darker field, and Ferd wondered at this often-seen mystery. Could sure use some water on that land.

There were a lot of cars at the well. Lot of people were interested, it seemed. A good well here might open up a new connection to the Langdon pool. Maybe run clear across his land.

Some of the cars belonged to the half-grown farm boys who came to play poker with the drilling crew, and in the beating light of bare, swinging light bulbs there was a game going on now. Ferd noticed the size of the pot when he went into the

shack; those who had lost to the roughnecks now had little time to get some of it back and were betting heavily. Those who had won in the past week or so played more cautiously. A group of neighbors were discussing a lease one of them had signed that day on the strength of this well showing high pay zones.

"Well, do you feel rich tonight, Ferd?" the farmer laughed. Ferd smiled, said nothing. The crew, who had seen him often, knew him as a usually quiet, morose man, but not sternly forbidding . . . with one or two he sometimes talked emphatically and at length, expressing himself strongly about politics and economy, glad to be expressing himself. In the crowd tonight he pushed himself into the background, looking for the geologist. He found him leaning against the wall, watching the game.

"Iss there any news yet, Mr. Simmonts?"

"Not yet, Ferd," Simmonds replied. "But we should know soon. It's softening up. Maybe next time we bail we'll have something." And Simmonds, who had waited with many land-owners and investors, put a hand on Ferd's shoulder. It made Ferd uncomfortable, and he moved away.

Yes, that soft, black zone must be near that sloshing, pounding cable-tool bit. Ferd watched alone from the pipe rack, slapping with his curved hand the cool, smooth circle of surface pipe and listening to the ring it made against the bellow of the engines. The heavy, beating rhythm of the pounding cable

bit seemed a natural part of the night, like any rhythm which because of its regularity seems as if it had no beginning and should have no end. When it suddenly stopped, it left an urgent, almost painful suspension, like a breath held in that must be let out. Then the relief of a steady pulse told that the driller was pulling the bit in order to bail out the muddy diggings in the bottom of the hole.

From where he stood Ferd could see a hundred flickering lights in the hills across the valley, and the wasted gas burning in the night made a pattern and burned constantly. He didn't move around the rig to join Simmonds where he waited to catch samples from the bailer, talking to one of the owners of the rig. The almost-animate coolness of the pipe which he rubbed was somehow pleasant.

"What d'ya find?" Over the noise of the engines the driller on the platform yelled to Simmonds. Ferd could hear mutterings of conversation between the owner and the geologist. An occasional flash of the battery light they were using to examine the samples would have been visible to Ferd, but he was looking at the sky above the glitter of gas lights. "The two kinds of light are a lot alike, but they don't make you feel the same," he thought. "Looking at the sky a man don't know if he's been waiting two weeks or twenty years . . . there's no difference up there."

Then he heard Simmonds cry to the driller, "Not yet."

The mutterings of conversation were now in the low-pitched tone of disappointment. "Thought it was too hard," Simmonds said.

Ferd's stiffened muscles tried to shut out all thoughts but his own. "No matter what, we still got to get in the alfalfa tomorrow and start working that quarter by the house next week," his mind told him. "Maybe better wait until next year to send Paul to college." His eyes were still raised to the unchanging blaze above and his fingers slowly, rhythmically rubbed the satisfying smoothness beside him.

"Not yet," echoed the driller to a question from inside the shack. "Looks like good-bye sand to me!"

VIII. LOVE THY NEIGHBOR

Carrie Langford had been up over an hour this early summer morning in July of 1923 before she woke Carl for his breakfast. Even this early one could feel the same dryness that caused farmers all over Western Kansas to look tight-skinned around their eyes and forehead when they saw their crops. But Carrie took joy in the freshness of the brisker night air. She was a slight figure as she walked outside to breathe the passing night's hinted scent and enjoy the dawn while there was still liveliness in the songs of birds and in the color of her preciously-guarded flowers.

The first shooting screen of orange light two-toned the square yellow-limestone house the same time as it painted the hilltops. Major Langdon had seen to it that his house was laid out on a position of prominence, and it sat barely off the knob of the ranging hill. Ever since, Carrie had labored to bring some of the greenness and softness of trees and plants to the prairie hillside. Even now she somewhat enviously looked down the course of Salt Creek below that marked its path to the Saline with sun-flaming trees and pools of cool darkness beneath. "Still, it's nice here," she thought, proud of the trees and flowering plants to which she had carried water by the bucketfull to help in their fight for survival in the shallow hillside soil. "This house," she thought, "is <u>one</u> solid, substantial thing that Bruce left, anyway. And there's

Carl, of course."

She went inside and called to her son, "Carl, your breakfast's ready," and dropped some eggs into the skillet and dished out steaming wheat meal for him.

Carl, physically mature for his 19 years and needing a shave badly, came rubbing his forehead and eyes. "It's gonna be a hot one again today outside, huh, Mom?" He squeezed her arm as he passed her.

She spoke to him from the stove where she was standing. "I was just thinking again this morning, dear, how nice it was of that friend of your father's to trade us back this pretty quarter of land with the house and creek for that quarter of land back on the hill. I know you don't remember, but that's all that gave us a place to live."

"Mom, he wasn't just being nice. You know this quarter of land is mostly ravines and hillside. Besides, he kept the mineral rights to both pieces of land, didn't he?"

She sat down with him at the table with a cup of coffee and smiled. "Now, why are you worrying about that royalty?"

"Well, Mom, Jeff Carney told me that the Lucky Seven has a survey run and everything. Lots of people are trying to buy up royalty."

"Yes, I know. There was a man here yesterday while you were out in the field. He offered a good deal of money for the royalty rights."

Carl hesitated, was silent for a while. "Well, we sure need the money," he said quietly, finally. "What did you tell him?"

"We have been getting along all right on what we have, haven't we, son? It doesn't take much to enjoy life."

"Mom, you can't just ignore a mortgage," he pleaded.

"I've been in debt on the land before--after your father died. We'll just do what we can do, and not make a toil out of pleasure. Besides, we have some more time left, you know."

"I know, Mom. I didn't want you to say you'd sold the mineral rights. There's something kinda special about maybe having something valuable under the land that's been hidden all the time."

"Chances are we don't," she laughed. "But there's no need selling any part of the land unless we really have to."

Carl ate his sticky, tasteless wheat meal that they had ground from their own grain. He didn't complain, and he thought of one of his mother's favorite statements, "Complaining about the food only makes it less edible." Very little, as far as he could see. He pushed the empty bowl away and reached for the eggs and biscuits. "Don't know what to do about working that east bottom today. Seems kinda useless to stir up the dust again. Hasn't really got a crust on since the last time I worked it . . . hasn't rained."

Carrie noted the sound of hopelessness in his voice. She sipped her coffee, said, "We might try to get some hay from that draw on the other side of the creek this morning. Is there any fuel in the car?"

"Yeah, I think a little."

"Well then, after dinner when it's too hot to work anyway, you might ride along with me. I should go see if there is anything I can do for the Carneys."

"Carneys! Mom, why waste the gas you haven't got? You can't help people like that. It either doesn't do any good or old lady Carney spits at you behind your back. There's not a person around here who feels sorry for them."

Emphatically but without raising her voice she commanded, "Carl, you stop that! You know I've taught you better . . . she's not 'old lady Carney.' And she is sick and they may lose their home."

"I know, Mom," he conceded somewhat tiredly.

Carrie's voice showed a trace of her Scottish accent as she went on. "Commom courtesy is due everybody, Carl. If people hadn't helped us, we wouldn't be here." She looked at her son, asking for understanding. "Why don't you clean up and shave? You'll feel better."

He nodded, got up from the table; he shaved nearly every day now, even when he wasn't going anyplace. His mother's neatness and orderliness was a habit with him, too, when it

most farmers. "Leisure is a little gift that shows you're master of your own time," she had once told Carl. Other farmers who grumbled and sweated to hurry tasks knew that wouldn't do, but Langdon's work always seemed to be done sufficiently.

She talked to the men for a time, then got up to get ready to leave. "There's some more tea in the icebox."

"Thank you, Miz Langdon," Sims replied, bobbing his head. The two continued talking of the oil-leasing activity that was the center of interest for nearly everyone this slow, hot July.

" . . . and Jeff Carney told me some of the owners who are holding out have been offered as much as fifty cents an acre for their leases."

"Fifty cents, ya say? Is that for . . . how long?"

"That's fifty cents an acre a year. Not a bad way to make money, eh, Sims? If you had enough land."

"I say it ain't."

Carl was silent for a moment. "We didn't get nothing for our land when we leased it. The Lucky Seven got the first block--Mattson's and ours and everybody's--just for a promise to drill a well somewhere on the block."

Sim's head and adam's apple bobbed again. "Hear they got some oil outfit from Wichita to buy one of the shares, though. Mebbe they gonna do somethin' purty quick, now,"

came to that. He agreed that it did make him feel better.

That noon the meal was shared by the part-time hand Carrie still tried to keep on and pay because his family needed the money. He was personally ill-kept, but Carrie always talked to him as if he were visiting company. "How are the babies, Sims?"

"Uh . . ." Sims drew out while he gulped a swallow of food. "They's jus fine, Miz Langdon." His whiskers grew over his adam's apple and waved violently on his thin neck when he swallowed; he smiled thinking of the always-happy new baby in his home and Carrie's desire to know.

"Mom," Carl broke in. "We didn't finish with the hay in that draw this morning, and . . ."

"Is there a lot there?"

"It's not too bad. Kinda short. But I guess we ought to finish it this afternoon. Don't think I'll go along with you, if you're still going."

"Yes, I think I'll go. Don't make it more important than it is."

After a pause Sims put in, "Good beef stew, Miz Langdon."

"Thank you, Sims. Have some more."

After dinner the two men sat for a while in the cool old house as Carrie gave them more cold tea to drink. She had made it a habit never to force work in passionate haste like

suggested Sims.

They went on talking about the subject which interested them both but Carl particularly. Neither added much that the other did not know or hadn't said before, but they savored thinking and talking about it. "Those two geologists that were here a couple of weeks ago told me . . ." Carl was saying when his mother interrupted him.

"I'm going now. Carl, will you help me put this in the car and start it for me?"

Carl got up and took the covered bushel basket . . . it was heavy. "What you got in here, Mom?"

"Oh, just some things we don't need. Some clothes and a few jars of those wild plums." Carl sat the basket on the seat beside her and cranked up the old car.

"I won't be gone long," she called over the noise. She sat up very straight as she went jerking down the hillside drive. Carl laughed as he remembered how they had learned to drive together four years ago when they bought the car, and how seriously she went about learning.

"Well, Carl, guess the work won't get done by itself," said Sims to show Carl he was willing to start back to work. He sat on the wooden porch putting on his shoes. The noon heat was shimmering above the hills and beat on Carl's shoulders until he could nearly smell the shirt being singed. He retreated to the shade of the porch.

"Yeah, that's right, I guess. Gosh, that's like an oven, though! Suppose it'll cool off very soon?" Carl sank to a sitting position, leaning against the yellow stone of the house. "There's not so much but what we could finish it in two-three hours today. Maybe after it gets a little cooler."

Sims took out a beaten and browned bag of tobacco and tore off a sheet of cigarette paper. The cigarette was very wet by the time he had finished rolling it, but the smoke seemed deliciously fragrant to Carl. He'd never tried a cigarette. "An uncontrollable habit," his mother told him. "Lack of control shows weakness."

He shook his head, thinking. "Mom went over to Carneys to see if she could help out," he said, his tone showing his disapproval.

Sims puffed on his cigarette. "Hear they got a good price for selling part of their oil royalty the other day," he said after a moment. He had been thinking that where he was from the Carneys would openly be called poor white trash, but he usually did not talk much about people.

"Is that right? I didn't know they had sold theirs!"

Sims nodded to back up the truth of his statement and grunted assent.

"Well," said Carl, uneasily scratching his back on the rock wall. "I wisht she hadn't gone over there. But you

know Mom and her ideas." He thought to himself, "Straight from the Bible, now--loving her neighbors to the letter."

"Miz Langdon is a fine woman. She got a sure set of values."

"Yeah, she sure has that, all right," Carl said, partly with pride and partly with the feeling that he often expressed to himself--that she substituted rules for common sense and for feeling. "She doesn't let things get through to her, really," Carl thought. "She's afraid to feel and say so, I think. Holds everything away from her with her thought-out little sermons and sayings."

As she drove down the river road, Carrie thought about how the scenery changed so quickly here according to the weather. Seemed like there was lots more grass and wild fruit and trees when she first came. She passed James Mattson working on his piece of bottom land across the river. His father was one of the first to come, and she remembered how he said his father remembered it--grass waist-high in places with antelope and quiet greenness that rivalled Ohio, he'd said. "No dust then," she thought, but her mind was really going another direction, and it forced her to think about those years when Bruce was gone and she wouldn't have kept even the two dusty sections she had now if it hadn't been for James Mattson. She felt again the disgust that Bruce's uncontrolled appetites had finally forced her to feel. She'd

been barely sixteen when she had come over with him from Scotland. Already lost so much of his inheritance that the only place he could get an estate big enough to satisfy his ego was here where the land was cheap. And then he had to play the part of the country gentleman! He never worked, and he kept on drinking and gambling until there was nothing left but the two sections of land in her name. "And he'd lost those, too, if I had let him!" But she didn't let herself feel again the bitterness that she had felt so long. At least his complete lack of control had taught her the answer of complete control. And if that hadn't been enough of a lesson . . . she still felt a flash of fear when she realized what might have happened if Bruce hadn't come back when he did from Colorado, even if he was a pathetic, dying alcoholic. She had been foolish for letting it happen, anyhow . . . but quiet James was the opposite of Bruce, even if he was colorless. And a woman can feel desire without love, too, she told herself. She had convinced herself now that James was just around too much, and she was too grateful for his help. "I'm positive Carl is Bruce's, but he might not have been!" At least no one knew, and her pregnancy had made her even more sure that discipline was important to a serene life.

Carrie cut off her reflections and looked ahead to the jumbled shacks that marked Carneys' place. They rented some land in addition to that they owned and lived in the tenant

house. They claimed the owner wouldn't fix up the place, and they shouldn't have to improve his property, and thus tried to answer for the buildings that were about to fall down in their wretchedness. But that didn't answer for the unpainted house with its sagging screen door and torn curtains behind dirty and broken glass panes--except for one room. The "drawing room" Violet Carney kept as nice as she knew how. She also kept it only for company.

Carrie drove into the junk-scattered yard grown over with browning weeds. Violet Carney herself came out to meet her as she drove up and stopped the car.

"Why, I thought you were ill, Violet!" Carrie turned off the car motor.

"How nice to see you, Carrie," the big woman said smoothly, a smile breaking across her horsey face. "Such a hot day to be out, too. Won't you come in the house?" Then she answered the question. "No, I'm feeling a lot better these last few days."

Carrie got out of the car; the drive had been hot and dusty, and driving the car was work for her.

"How is Carl and everything at your place?" Violet asked without seeming to listen to the answer.

"Fine. Everything is a little dusty, though, isn't it?" she replied as they went into the house and passed through the kitchen and cluttered dining room. Violet opened

the closed living room for Carrie to enter. The dark-wallpapered room was severe in its disuse. An ornamented, spindley secretary was beside the red-flowered divan with its embellished legs and headboard. There were two rocking chairs with sweeping, carved backs and scroll-worked arms. The matching lamps were also red, with hanging cut glass to simulate chandeliers. A case for the unused good dishes filled one corner. Violet let up two blinds for some light, feeling a little awkward with her guest and a little angry because Lila hadn't come in to dust the room today. It lay on her good furniture in a haze that she noticed much more than her guest did.

"Let me get you something cool to drink," she said, not quite sounding as gracious as she would have liked.

"Oh don't bother, Violet. I can't stay long. I told Carl I'd be right back."

But Violet had already gone back into the kitchen to pour out some fruit-mix drink. She had no ice, and she was angry for it.

"Violet," Carrie called in from the other room. "There are some things out in the car I thought you might be able to use."

"We don't need anything," Violet said perhaps more flatly than she intended as she carried in her two glasses, whose contents spilled with her mannish stride.

"Oh, they aren't anything," Carrie said, sensing the unpleasant tone in the woman's voice. "There were so many wild plums and grapes up Salt Creek this year, and I thought you could use some."

Mrs. Carney was still standing, holding the lukewarm sugar drinks. "I know there weren't all that many this year." Her tone had been severe, and for a moment she wavered toward smiling and passing it off lightly. Then she followed her temper. "We really don't need nona yer do-gooding around here any more."

"But Violet, you know I don't mean it that way," Carrie cried out, shocked at the sudden revealing of anger.

"Yes, you do. You like the way it makes you feel to think you're all the time being so saintly," she accused.

"Oh, Mrs. Carney," pleaded Carrie, hating the display.

Violet Carney did not know how to apologize. In the corner into which she backed herself, all she could do was strike out. "Your damned high-and-mighty act all the time." She snorted. "Well, we don't need nona that any more."

Carrie backed out of the door, not knowing how to answer the language or suddenness of the barrage.

"I think I had better leave," she said firmly.

Feeling somehow bettered by Carrie's dignified retreat, Carney's own fire boiled her farther into rage. She stalked Carrie. "What makes you so damned goody-goody, d'ya think?

Drunken husband that left you. You so refined you couldn't keep him satisfied?"

"Let me go!" lashed out Carrie, and pushed around the other woman.

"Comin' unstarched, huh? Think anyone liked your do-gooding around here? And I suppose you're so damned good? At least I'm sure who all my kids belong to!"

Carrie gasped. "You're a slut!" she spat at the taller woman, and tried to slap her.

Violet caught her arm, shoved her against the car. "Try to hit me, huh?" and she thrust her face a few inches away from Carrie's, spuming abuse.

Violet's oldest daughter, Lila, who usually cowered under the rule of her mother, came running from the garden where she had been working. The seventeen-year-old pulled at her mother's shoulder, her face white and shocked.

"Mother!" she pleaded. "How can you . . ."

"You get the hell out of here!" Violet shouted, and shoved her daughter away. She picked up a nearby rock and threw it as a man might throw a stick at a dog.

Carrie, sobbing for the loss of control and feeling dizzy from the swirl of violence and hate, picked up the car crank and tried to start the car. She was feminine and futile. Violet shoved her aside, grabbed the crank, and jerked it in complete revolutions like a man. The motor caught and

roared.

Determined not to kill the motor, Carrie wiped the tears blinding her eyes, methodically worked the controls, and drove out of the yard as fast as she dared. Violet threw the crank after her, and Carrie could hear the epithets rise in pitch as she got farther away until they sounded like the faint screamings of a wild woman.

She drove until she found a place where no one would stop to see if she needed help with a stalled car. She pulled from the road and, jerking the clutch, killed the motor. She realized she was trembling uncontrollably, and she sobbed, admitting the strength of her denied emotions. "Like a streetfight! Aren't I any better than she is? That dirty slut . . . damn!" she moaned, a slight, shaking figure crumbled over the steering wheel. With her head buried in her arms she held her breath for a moment, and coughed it out with a sobbing cry. Then she suddenly beat her hands and arms violently and viciously upon the unyielding steering wheel.

When she stopped, finally, Carrie's arms were reddened and bruised and she was sobbing as much from one kind of pain as she was the other. She gripped her aching fists until she appeared calmer. Then she realized that she had killed the car and wouldn't be able to get it started again. "It's not far home, though," she thought, and shakily laughed to

herself, "Well, at least I'm reasoning about something!" She got out and rested against the car for a few minutes, and she felt stronger.

Then Carrie began walking home, generalizing and catergorizing the past events until she had them labeled and under control. By the time she was home, Carl was there, and she was able to correctly tell him about not having the car crank. She didn't belittle Violet Carney.

And after Carl and Sims left to get the car, she quietly walked and looked at her border design of flowers lighted by the filtered orange of the twilight-winking sun. A row of violets had wilted from the day's heat, and she immediately went to get some water to revive them.

IX. YOUNG MEN DREAM

Tonight was the fifth time the old man had showed up at the rig. The crew had ceased laughing at him a long time ago, and when Bill looked at this plain-appearing man, who seemed to posses such a strange genius, he got an odd feeling about him.

They had started calling him the "Prophet" in mock seriousness. A gaunt, bony frame that probably had been over six feet now stooped a little. What hair he had left was a nondescript gray and topped a most homely, tight-skinned face, many times unshaven, whose outstanding feature was a huge bulbous nose that often had hair on it. However, one didn't notice the poverty of the face because it was always arranged in a pleasant expression. When he wasn't wearing a pair of ragged overalls, he always wore the same dirty, unpressed suit that defied classification as to color. Bill decided it was blue-gray and black.

Bill worked for Redco Drilling Company, and they did mostly wildcatting. Predicting wildcat wells seemed to be the old man's specialty, and he showed up at almost every location with his old Chevy. They had started calling him the Prophet after his first couple of appearances at the Redco rig. Talking around, Bill found that he'd been working in the area for years before they had moved in, doing just as he was now. He'd circle the rig a couple of times and

park the Chevy as close to the drilling table as possible. Fifteen minutes later he'd come into the doghouse.

He'd just wait around until someone asked him what he thought of the well, and then he'd tell them in four or five positive words, spoken quietly. At first the driller and roughnecks were anxious to bet him on his unlikely predictions, and the old man took odds. He had only lost once that Bill knew of, and then Bill and the others felt the pay zone had been sealed off with too much drilling pressure and drilling mud that was too thin.

After he had been right the first few times, the crew ceased betting him and talked speculatively to each other about the old man's luck. But the name they had tagged him with began to stand for something as the men astonished saw him call his shot time after time.

Daylight driller Rocky Sanders didn't get to see the old man, as he never showed except at night. Rocky was pretty old for a driller, but he was skilled and experienced. He also had a lot of memories. When Bill told him of the old man's doings, Rocky exclaimed, "Bill, don't you make too much fun of that guy. I've seen dozens of 'em, some of 'em crackpots and some college brains, all thinkin' they got a sure way to beat the game. And by God, if the truth were known about how many wells have been doodlebugged and how right some of those wizards are, some mighty big companies would

have red faces."

"That right?" exclaimed Bill.

"Sure! When I was workin' for Locks in Louisiana, some guy'd come around to every well and tell us what it was goin' to be. They finally ordered us to keep him away from the rig. Seems like he'd tried to get 'em to hire him and they wouldn't because he wasn't 'scientific.' He'd write 'em each time and tell them what the well they was drilling was gonna do. He was makin' 'em a laughingstock."

Like many drilling crews, Bill and the others had seen and heard of plenty of crackpot doodlebuggers who used everything from a truckload of gadgets to a brass rod to claim the ability to find an oil structure every time. A few surely had something, because all seemed to have faith in themselves. But usually they were braggarts, ready to praise themselves and tell of their achievments. They talked of the times they were right, never mentioning the times they were wrong, and were mostly in evidence after the well was drilled, saying they knew just how it was going to be.

The Prophet laid claim to nothing and never spoke of his past correct calls. He just produced the right answer. Bill wondered what he got for all his trouble. Five bucks here and there from his bets, it looked like, and a lot of whispers and wondering looks.

Bill was twenty-three, but he'd been working around

drilling rigs for seven years. He'd broken in while he was in high school, and after trying two years of college he'd been working full-time. He planned to go back and finish someday, but now he lived from day to day in dirty motels or sometimes sleeping in his car--working, eating, drinking and chasing, acting on rough instincts with the niceties of social convention false and needless. But he was saving a little money. He knew he should have finished college while he was started, but his folks were pushing him to make better grades, to be successful at this and that. His studies demanded all his time, useless as many of them were; Carol demanded all his time. There were so damned many things he had to do that finally Bill decided he didn't have to do any of it.

Anyhow, he didn't mind this kind of life. The very crudeness of it made it somehow honest. They'd just finished going back in the hole and would have a little down time; it was nearly nine o'clock, and on evening tower that was past time to eat. He went into the doghouse, banged up the bench lid, glanced at the pin-ups on the bottom of it, and got his lunch. The crew was talking about the Prophet, as usual.

"Hell," Butch, the evening tower driller was saying, "here these damned brains spend millions trying to figure out somethin' to find oil. So they send out siesmegraphs that cost a thousand dollars to take a shot and still miss eighty

per cent of the time. You know what this guy does for a living? He's a bachelor, lives on some damn little farm about twelve miles from our last location. And he's the guy that's right damned neart every time!" He shook his head.

"What's he use," spoke up Casy, who came out in the Apex truck to take the electric logs for Redco. "Divining rod?" he laughed.

"Nobody knows," spoke up Slimmer, who had tried to find out one night. "He only comes around at night and always locks that damn car when he's not in it." Everyone laughed at Slimmer, remembering his venture to ease his curiousity by trying the car while the old man was in the doghouse.

"You know, I heard of some guy did pretty good with just a peach limb and his arms dipped in oil?" spoke up Shorty, and the discussion trailed on as it always did, with their telling of crackpots they had seen or heard about. But compare him to them as they would, each knew it wouldn't do to classify their Prophet with the crackpots.

Bill just put on the feed bag. He usually didn't have much to say when they talked about the old man, but he listened to everything that was said. He did most of his wondering to himself instead of out loud. After the other men had talked over their curiosities, it didn't seem to bother them for a while, but Bill did a lot of thinking about the old man.

"Why, the old boy really has something! If I could do that I'd have a Caddie now. Lease up a block, drill one well, and you could play the rest out on an over-ride royalty. No-risk cinch to greasy money. Why'n the hell don't he do something with it instead of just coming around here? Kinda odd." Bill wondered if any of the other guys felt as funny as he did about the old man; he couldn't get him off his mind. "What he's doing is just too damned impossible!"

About a month later they had moved back to the lease that Butch said was only twelve miles from the old man's little farm. Bill pumped Butch carefully for all the details he knew of the location of the farm. Tuesday afternoon when it was Slimmer's turn to drive from the ramshackle hotel where they were staying, Bill said, "You guys go on ahead and I'll drive out, too. Got me a little something lined up in Fortsville for after work, and I'll drive on from the rig."

"Soiled dove!" crowed Slimmer. The others greeted his words with derisive comments and suggestions and drove off.

Bill drove out of the unpainted, rowdy boom town lost in thought. In the past few weeks he had been trying to become acquainted with the old man and had been observing everything about what he did. He noticed that whenever possible he had someone along to drive the old Chevy, because when he did not, it took him much longer to check the well, and he made frequent stops and starts. So it was some sort of instrument

he had to work himself. One time Bill had climbed to the double board when he had seen the Chevy approaching and had caught a glimse of something that seemed either built into the dash or else held on the old man's lap. He gripped it with both hands as he sat very rigid. But it could have been anything.

He hadn't found it difficult to become acquainted with the old man so far, as the pleasant expression he wore seemed to speak of the man underneath. Although he was a quiet old man, Bill had begun to like him and feel the wiseness in him. Back at the rig, Bill carried out his work with the crew woodenly. Slimmer noticed it.

"Say, Billo, you look pretty frozen up! If that hustler in Fortsville's got you that unwelded, you better take me along for some moral support!" he laughed.

"Don't let it eat you up," Bill replied. "You wouldn't get off that easy bench if it was French Kate, I don't think . . . 'less it was on other people's money!" Bill slapped at his arm and they roughhoused out to the pits to shape up some drilling mud.

After the evening tower shift changed, Bill made a show of hurrying around getting his greasers off and slicking up until the crew left. Then he put his khakis on and streched out in his car to sleep. About nine o'clock in the morning he cleaned up and drove away in the direction of the old man's farm.

As he drove, Bill wondered to himself what he expected to accomplish. Of course, he had found the old man to be friendly and fairly easy to approach, but whether that was enough to leave a possibility of getting in was yet to be seen. Bill dreamed on about the money he might sink a bit into if only he could sway this queer genius.

It wasn't hard to find the old man's farm--at least not nearly as hard as it might have been. Highway 40 leveled through a land flat for miles of river bottom before it heaved upward into smooth hills that bordered the course of the valley. A main road from the highway went west of the farm and a dirt sliver trailed past the drive where an old parked Chevy signaled him in. He noted the name on the mailbox and drove to the neat-painted small farmhouse.

A sagging woven-wire fence separated him from two bouncing white terrier dogs that yapped loudly but without malice. After a minute Bill opened the gate to go to the screen door, and one of the dogs darted through and headed around the chicken house. He reappeared just as Bill decided there was no one in the house. "The old man must be wherever that dog went," Bill thought. The name on the mailbox had said Chad Neesan. "Chad. That would be Chadwick, probably. Does Chadwick sound like . . ." Bill shrugged his shoulders and thought, "Hell, why not?" As he followed the path around the chicken house, Bill noticed a sign that said "This Is A

Pollorum-Approved Flock." "Raises eggs for a hatchery," thought Bill, and he noticed how the yard had been stripped of any vegetation by the foraging of the hens.

Then Bill saw Chad. Suddenly he wondered what he had to say to him, and Bill began to feel like a fool. "Now that I'm here, I've got nothing to offer him and he's probably been approached by dozens of guys like me." He had been driven here by the feeling that he must make the old man see in himself an ability to really accomplish something, and Bill saw along with that bare possibility of gain for himself by trailing along. He realized how futile and silly it would turn out, since he hardly knew him and had little money to offer for a partnership. "Now what do I say to him?" Bill thought. "Let's you and me go out and make a million for me?"

Chad was seated on a low stool surrounded by hundreds of sacks of drill-cutting samples. In front of him was a beaten wooden box, which he quickly shut. Beside him was a dry-cell battery, copper wire rolls, springs, and smaller dull-metaled box, and many other articles. Bill wanted to go closer, but the old man walked away from his stool and forward to meet him.

"Hello, there, boy," he said with obvious recognition and an agreeable expression.

And after Bill had greeted him there was no need to worry about approaching him, as the old man steered the conversation.

After talking in generalities for a while, Bill, casting about for something to say, asked, "What is that? I've never seen anything like it!" He was referring to a forked stick Chad was carrying. Chad held it up; it was a switch from a tree, cut off near a fork so that it would have been in the shape of a boy's peashooter had the straight end been longer and the forked ends shorter. The two ends were very long and molded to flowing out-curves that hadn't come from natural growth. Chad grunted what might have been a chuckle.

"I have to dig another water well. I was tracing a vein this mornin'!"

"With that?" asked Bill, guarding for scepticism in his voice.

"I'd never dig a foot without checking it like this first, and neither would anybody else around here." Gripping the curved ends of the fork, he went on, "Come here, I'll show you where it is." As they started walking, the point of the fork swung loosely, pointing up. Suddenly it twisted until it pointed almost directly downward. "Here's the edge of it," said the old man. "It's this wide," and he walked onward until the stick bobbed upward and swung loosely once more.

Bill watched fascinated. He'd heard of water witches, but it had been, he thought, idle talk about rare happenings and foolish men. The old man continued criss-crossing what he called the water vein, with the stick ducking and bobbing until

he had worked up to the well that was already dug.

"If this vein runs close enough to the house I'll dig in it. There's another that comes in from the northwest that I have to check."

"Will that thing work like that for anybody?" asked Bill.

"No, very few," replied Chad. "My father could, but I don't know of many others."

"Aren't we all made the same?" asked Bill, thinking to himself that it looked like malarky. But he remembered that the old man had already proved himself in his other more impossible doings.

"Let me try it once." Chad handed him the stick. Bill gripped it as he had seen the old man do and started walking.

"Hold it tightly with the tips of your fingers against your palms," instructed the old man.

The stick waved loosely upward in Bill's hands as he walked. Suddenly it became alive, a serpent writhing in his hands, twisting downward and tearing against the flesh of his fingertips and palms. He released his grip, and as he did the stick again became a dead twig, swinging loosely downward from his hands.

Almost shouting, the old man demanded, "Did that stick move by itself or did you do it?"

Half dazed, Bill answered, "It was like it came alive!"

"Come over here, and hold it again," commanded the old man. Bill did as he demanded and again the stick writhed downward. He tried to hold it upward but it twisted and then slipped in his hands.

"Over there, by that tree, and back up with your eyes shut," commanded the old man next, as he took a position where the stick had pulled down. As Bill backed up the stick again repeated its action, and Bill opened his eyes to find himself beside Chad. The old man seemed satisfied and mumbled something to himself. He invited Bill to stay for dinner.

On the way to the house they passed the stool where the old man had been sitting. A beaten old book lay open and face downward beside the stool, but Bill couldn't see its title.

It wasn't much of a meal, and Bill realized why Chad was so gaunt and thin. The old man was noticeably friendlier toward him, however, and seemed almost talkative as he asked him of family and background. They went on to talk of oil discoveries and exploration, and in the fervor of the conversation Bill dropped a hint that was not a hint as much as a plea. So before he left, Chad asked Bill to accompany him on one of his nightly jaunts to a nearby rig.

As Bill drove away, his brain worked in confusion as he tried to fathom the significance of the things he had done and seen in the three hours he had spent with the old man. He realized there must be some connection between the old man's

interest in him and his ability to work that crazy stick. The curious things with which the old man had been working gave food for thought that his reason worried over hungrily. But events had led where he felt they must--with him getting a chance to be working with the old man in his curious doings.

Two days later Bill's crew lay over for daytime rigging up and Bill set a straight course for Chad's house. He did so with excitement gripping him, for tonight he would finally see the old man's machine. The machine that could make them both rich if--and Bill's dreams trailed on.

"Hello, there, boy," Chad said greeting him as before, but this time with warmth.

"Hi, Chad," replied Bill, feeling self-conscious about his ill-concealed, over-powering curiosity. "Were you planning to check a well anyplace tonight?"

"Well, we might try your new location, since you're here to drive."

"Yeah, there won't be anybody out there tonight," said Bill, making superficial conversation while his mind raced ahead.

"We've got an hour or so. Come here, I want to show you something." Bill walked with him to a shed from which Chad lugged out the beaten old box Bill had seen before. He went back in and handed Bill a small but heavy steel box as he returned. Then Bill watched excitedly as Chad lifted the

first box and fastened it around his neck with a leather strap so that it hung in front of him. He walked to where he had been seated on the stool a few days before.

"We'll start her here. It's neutral. Open that box and give me the blue cluster." Bill fumbled with the catch on the box he carried and finally got it open and stared at its contents. It was divided into two compartments, both lined with several layers of foil, as was the lid. Bill fingered it. "Lead foil," he thought dumbly to himself. Inside were two clusters that looked like small plastic rods that clung together. One cluster was tinted blue and the other red. As Bill reached to pick up the blue one, a shock as if from static eletricity popped at his hand, and he jerked it back, nearly dropping the box in his surprise.

Chad chuckled. "Go ahead, it's just an initial shock and won't hurt you. Bill steeled himself against the second shock, picked up the cluster, and handed it to the old man as if it were red hot.

Chad opened the top of the box he carried and inserted the cluster between several sets of springs and a coil, or so it looked to Bill. Then three sides of the box came off, revealing three indicator needles facing the old man and shaped openings in the sides of the contraption which partially revealed grips that continued into the interior. These Chad gripped so that his arms lay in grooves along the

sides and his hands were almost inside the box. As he had done with the water-witching stick, Chad began walking.

"There's a light oil structure running through here someplace," declared the old man.

They had walked about 250 yards east of the house and into an alfalfa field when one of the indicator needles began slowly to move to the right, toward the side marked with positive att. and other symbols meaningless to Bill.

"The main thing about this, if you've got the power to run it, is concentration. You've got to keep very calm and concentrate."

And Bill realized Chad was instructing him!

The old man stopped and made an adjustment and pulled a switch. The largest of the three needles began clicking back and forth in an arc, reaching farther on its marked scale each time. Five . . . six . . . seven . . . and it lost force and waved back to its original position.

"It's not too strong here, you see," said Chad. "Now hand me the other cluster. It works when a structure . . ." his voice trailed on and Bill was lost in the words of the old man. The more he saw, the more mystified he became, but Bill had begun to work with his Prophet.

Through the weeks they visited rig after rig in the old man's Chevy, with Bill driving and insisting upon working a wider and wider area in his enthusiasm. The old man worked

the Box from a carriage built for it on the dash. Sometimes Bill held it, still not understanding why or how it worked but finding out what the indications meant. Always there was the same admonition from the old man. "Keep calm and concentrate."

When Chad himself worked the Box, he was lost in that concentration. He chain-smoked constantly, no matter what he was doing, changing his cigarette brand every few days. Often as he gripped the Box, his cigarette's ashes would grow long and tumble off. Sometimes he seemed to forget about it, and the smoke trailed up into his watering eyes and it either burned down to singe his lips or he clenched on it until saliva wet the whole cigarette and put it out. Whenever either happened, he lit another and repeated the performance.

Bill began to know part of the answers to the questions he asked about why the old man never "did anything" with his power. Exploring and finding out and knowing as they did was a satisfying experience in itself. But still Bill looked ahead and dreamed.

One day they drove back from checking a location nearly fifty miles away, Chad working the Box as they went along the graveled road. Bill spoke up, "This has been a two-mile stretch that shows up pretty good, doesn't it?"

"We're driving over one of the best pools in the state," answered Chad surely. "And it hasn't been touched. Geology

has condemned it as dry-hole territory and most of it isn't even leased."

Excitement rose in Bill until it clamored deafeningly in his ears and pounded in his chest.

"This is it! We can lease up this block, always be one hundred per cent sure of results, and we've got the whole world by the nose!" Bill knew it all in an instant and poured it out to the old man.

Six weeks later Bill was in hock for everything he owned. He and the old man had three thousand acres under optional lease so that if a well wasn't drilled in thirty days, the lease was automatically lost. When others heard of the Prophet leasing a block, surrounding leases brought premium prices from promoters because most people felt as if it must be a real bonanza to finally get the Prophet to bet on it.

As the promoters put it, they wouldn't have a "snowball's chance in hell" of keeping the lease unless they drilled to keep it. But that's the way Bill wanted it. He wanted quick results. Besides he had to have it that way; Bill didn't even have money to eat decently after scrapping up $7,500 for his bite of the interest in the well. After the first one he could get credit anywhere. He had it figured that they could sell all the oil they could pump for a while, since this was wildcat territory. A well as big as

this one was going to be could be on velvet in a month--then it'd be clear profit. Get a couple more and the dough would really snowball. Ought to be making two-three hundred dollars a day before the year was out.

Then it was time to pick the location. "We've still got to be careful," said the old man. "There are dead spots in every structure. We'll get an early start in the morning."

But the next morning Bill took him to the hospital helpless and in torturous pain from kidney stones.

"I'll be all right," said Chad through teeth clenched in pain. "I had one before. But you'll have to pick the location yourself; they're coming out day after tomorrow to dig the pits."

Bill was dizzy from this turn of events.

"Don't worry, boy," he said. "You've got it in you to run it. Just be sure of yourself and concentrate. Don't get nervous, just be sure of yourself."

"Just be sure of myself," said Bill to himself the next day. "Just one day to pick the location. With Chad we could have done it in two hours. But . . . just one day, and by myself!" He began to get nervous, and calmed himself with an effort.

He loaded the Box and headed out to their lease. "Three thousand acres to run." God! What if he read it wrong? As much as Chad had explained it to him, he was sure

of what the indicator readings meant, but he didn't know enough of why it worked to make him feel sure. Then he fought his doubt again until a feeling of responsibility took its place. He'd set this stake and by himself make the decision that would make his future!

Bill first drove around the lease getting the general trend of the stronger readings. Then he worked to pinpoint the strongest. Sometimes his mind leaped to the future, but he forced himself to concentrate until sweat broke out on his forehead.

While rechecking some of his readings, Bill suddenly realized they were different the second time! Panic rose in him--how could it be? He rechecked a third time. Again they differed. Working the grips of the machine, Bill saw with a shock that he could influence the reactions muscularly with the flexible grips! So this was the reason for the stabilizing arm grooves and the old man's constant reprimand for him to keep calm and concentrate. You had to concentrate, or you'd change the readings!

Bill slumped in defeat. What would he do now? Chad's machine was far from perfect as a machine; it was subject to human error. Perhaps he had forced the readings he had been getting only because he had wanted them, without realizing it. He hadn't worked the machine enough to know.

Bill finally realized there was no turning back.

They'd lose the lease if they didn't get started drilling. He had to believe that what he read this time was right; then it would be. Calming himself, Bill made his final selection of location like a stunned automaton, checked the positive components against the negative in his indicator readings. They seemed all right. Then he went back to Chad's farmhouse. He felt near to nervous collapse, and knew there would be no more checking of the location now. Each try would only unnerve him more and make his readings more inaccurate.

On Thursday the contracted drilling company dug the pits where Bill had placed the red banner, and Friday the rig moved in.

Domino Drilling, Inc., owned the rig that they had contracted to drill the well, christened the Mayfield No. 1. Bill watched their crew with judging eyes as they came out of the hole to replace the bit, worn by hard chert drilling. The chain slinger was pretty fast. Bill walked over and looked at the driller's knowledge box where the drilling log said they were down 2,338 and were drilling at minutes per foot that ranged from 18 to 35. That was damned slow, thought Bill, shaking his head. They had topped the first pay zone the night before. He had been right there to watch it and now was staying put at the rig, too nervous to leave. But he was getting worse from staying and feeling the suspense. They had topped the Lansing high enough to produce, but it

was hard and dry. Well, there were plenty of other zones left.

Bill decided there was no reason for him to stay in the doghouse and went back to the geologist's trailer house. Domino's geologist was Sandy Grant, who had been out of college about three years an' worked everything by the book. While the young geologist reminded Bill of all the things he himself had never completed, he liked Sandy until he realized Sandy's half-open scoffing attitude toward him because he knew how the location had been chosen. Bill finally decided he'd just ignore Grant's remarks and his attitude. "He'll soon change the sound of his noise when this comes in." While Grant never said as much, Bill could tell he felt there wasn't a chance for the well. He had announced the first Lansing samples were dry in a voice that said, "I could have told you as much without looking at them."

Domino's best driller, Bill thought, was Link Fritter, on graveyard shift from twelve to eight in the morning. He was about 35, likable and intelligent. Bill spent lots of time in the doghouse with him when Link was on the shift and thus stayed away from Grant and his attitude.

Chad, in the hospital, was improving now, but slowly. His operation had been pretty hard on him. The doctor told Bill Chad might get out in a week at the earliest, so Bill would be sweating the well alone all the way.

"Have you seen this log on the Helton well a mile east of here?" asked Grant back in the trailer. He handed it to Bill, who glanced at it and saw they had abandoned the well at 3,112 feet.

"How come they didn't go to Arbuckle on their test?" questioned Bill.

"There are cavities in this area about that depth," answered Grant. "A dry hole several miles south of here ran into one that cost them $20,000 before they gave it up. They stuffed everything imaginable into that hole trying to get circulation back; they finally tried holding it by shoving mattresses into the hole, but there was no end to it."

Bill merely grunted.

"We're liable to run into the same thing here," said Grant meaningfully.

"There could be pay underneath there yet if they had gone through to it, couldn't there?"

"Possibly, but only a slight chance."

"Well, they wouldn't have run into the cavities if they'd been on structure," declared Bill with finality.

A few hours later as Bill wandered into the doghouse, he saw that the drilling time had eased up to twelve and fifteen-minute feet. "Looks like we're coming into a structure break," the driller said to Bill. Grant, already at Bill's elbow, said, "Drill another seven feet and circulate. I want

some of those samples. The third Kansas City break should be showing up pretty soon, and if that's it, it's coming in pretty high.

When he had the samples, Bill looked at a few of the pieces Grant picked out for him. He noted excitedly there were almost complete stains on some of the pieces as they showed up under the glass! "Baby, here comes the Cadillac!" thought Bill. "We'll take a drill-stem here," said Grant matter-of-factly.

Even the crew seemed excited as they came out of the hole to attach the apparatus to record the pressure at the bottom of the hole and collect fluid that it pushed in--oil, water, or the drilling mud they were using in the hole. After they had run the long joints of pipe back in the hole, and timed the recording that was going on beneath them, they attached a hose to the pipe and stuck it in a bucket of water. When the valve was opened, fillup in the hollow drill-pipe would force air out of it, which they would be able to see in the bubbling of the water in the bucket.

Slowly the valve was opened, and all eyes watched the bucket. The first bubble formed slowly at the end of the hose and broke for the surface; then the tempo of the bubbling increased. Bill held his breath, waiting for them to build into a foamy crescendo--but they didn't. One of the crew shook his head. "Don't know--don't look too good," he said.

And he was right. It wasn't too good. There was plenty of pressure--in fact, very good pressure--but as the pipe came up from the hole and the roughneck tapped each with a hammer to judge its fillup, it was soon apparent that there was almost no fillup in the drill pipe. The two joints that did resound a "tuck" to the roughneck's hammer opened to reveal their contents only muddy water. "Hardly a shine," a floor hand said.

Bill went back to sit in the old man's Chevy to try and think. "Wrong--wrong! What could it be? All my money. . . no chance, no college, no Carol." He hadn't realized consciously how much she still meant to him or how important this was to all his future. "Can't be wrong--never missed before. My fault if it does. Damn that machine made so I could make a mistake. Think I'm a crackpot now; never have another chance. Grant says there's no Arbuckle--."

But how does he know? Bill remembered how the old man used to tell him that he could take the machine up to an old hole or beside the drill stem and tell if the right pay zone had been drilled through. That was what he'd have to do. If the attraction that Bill had found still showed up, it still would be deeper yet! "So what if Arbuckle is uncommon here?" Bill asked himself. "No sign it couldn't be here." He'd have to take the Box over to the drilling table and find out. "They'll laugh at me if . . . Well, what if they do?" he

thought. They laughed at the Prophet, too. Bill rigged the machine and read the structure sitting in the car. Then he read it again and again. The readings varied just a little, but any of them were good enough to insure a good well.. Well, that was all right. Bill heaved a sigh. I've got to try it at the well, he thought, and kicked open the door so he could get the cumbersome box out.

He read toward the well, then stopped and flexed his hands, watching how this changed the reading. "I shouldn't have done that. Now I won't know again," thought Bill.

Nervousness was a shaky hand gripping him as Bill watched the indicator needles and tried to get an objective reading. He felt himself tense with the strain, and tried not to think of all that centered on this reading. He climbed up the end of the catwalk and moved toward the drilling table. They were drilling again now, having gone back into the hole with the bit again, and the low roar of the motors vibrated the walk as it did the ground all around.

The needle that Bill had watched so fascinated the day with Chad he now watched even more closely. It swayed wavering to the side of "positive att" as he continued down the catwalk. If only it stayed there as he walked up and around to the kelly. It did! It wavered but remained to the right as Bill walked around the table. "I'll try it again and then take a strength-depth reading," said Bill half-aloud. His breath was

coming in jerks and gasps as if he was waging some sort of battle. He took two more steps . . . then--Bill's eyes widened as the needle began to dip and sink. He tensed: and then the needle rose again; it dipped; it rose; and Bill realized he was working his hands madly and the vibrations were putting him off balance and he noticed for the first time the crew standing around him watching silently and disbelievingly.

Bill jumped off the drilling table and half-ran back to the car. His thoughts whirled in wild circles but achieved only broken patterns. He found haven in the car and sank mentally exhausted.

After he had calmed himself, Bill reasoned that there was a good chance that there was oil yet in the Arbuckle or lower production zones. Chad had found the structure itself and pronounced it good, and although there might be dry spots in it, hadn't it read good more times than not for Bill at this location?

He had to convince Grant that he still felt the well would be good. "I do feel the damned thing is going to be good," Bill countered his own thoughts defensively. "He'll want to quit when we start getting deeper to protect the rig and the contractor, but I'll just have to convince him that we thought it would be this deep all the time and contracted for it that way. That's my only chance to come through this thing. If I give up now, it leaves me nothing. As long as we're drilling

here, there's a chance."

Bill felt the stubble on his face as he walked to the trailer. He hadn't left the rig for three days and had been living on next to nothing for food, but he hadn't felt one pang of hunger.

It was a day later when Grant started what Bill knew he would.

"These middle pays haven't shown up anything. We could call this structure we're in now the top of the Arbuckle and call it quits. Take a look at it; it does resemble Arbuckle; see those crystalline shapes?"

Bill looked and replied, making his voice sound sure and even. "But it isn't. There's going to be oil in the Arbuckle."

Grant didn't reply right away, and they didn't talk much until about an hour later when Link, the driller Bill liked, came into the trailer. Then Grant edged the subject of porous cavities into the conversation.

"Yeah," Link said, "If we go much deeper there's quite a danger of getting the drill pipe stuck in the hole from losing all our mud in a cavity. Some of the softer zones we've gone through will slough in and get it stuck if we lose that drilling mud casing."

Bill felt a little irritated at the way Link explained it as if to a child. Bill knew the danger as well as Link did. But he also knew he must, somehow, make them go on. Even, if

necessary, through the open or porous zone. Bill felt they could get through it . . . they must. Well, probably that structure wouldn't even show up here.

Then the trailer door jerked and a dirty roughneck thrust his head in and shouted, "Link! We're losin' mud!" and was gone. Link jumped to his feet and disappeared quickly, and Grant followed, saying almost cheerfully, "This is probably it!"

Bill didn't move. He knew they'd get through it without losing circulation. Probably just a few open holes the size of a fist. In fifteen minutes Grant was back.

"They're got her stopped. Do you want them to go on? Probably just keep losing mud a little at a time until they lose it all."

"Yeah, tell them to ease back slow and keep going," said Bill, realizing they looked to him for the decision and enjoying the position.

Grant hesitated and then said, "They're about out of mud, now. If they lose any more, they won't have any to fill back with."

"Hasn't the truck the other driller called come with another load yet?"

"He didn't call him," said Grant.

"I told you to tell him to!" exclaimed Bill. Grant only shrugged and Bill felt anger rising in him.

"You could put a dozen loads into that hole and it wouldn't help if it opens up," declared Grant.

"But it hasn't 'opened up' yet!" said Bill angrily.

"Well, if you want to call another load, we'll circulate here if we can 'til he gets out with it. They'll need more water, too. Here's the numbers to call." He stopped, then continued. "You oughta just hang her on the beam and you know it."

Bill took the numbers and lurched out in anger. He realized they all felt that he would have given up by now, and they had planned accordingly. Well, he hadn't.

It was three in the morning and Bill felt sheepish about rousing the farmer to use his phone, but after all, the well would be his, too. To his relief, however, the farmer had been awakened by Bill's lights or the dog and was waiting for him at the door; he led Bill to the old-style phone in the dark kitchen.

Bill thought about trying to call Chad and talk to him about what was going on. Maybe he could give him an idea of what he should do. Then he decided he probably couldn't talk to him in the hospital anyway and rang for the water truck driver. It took a long time to get the calls through, and Bill could tell that both of the men had been in bed and weren't in very good temper about being called out this time of night. Besides, Bill had to shout to them over

the noisy country line, and by the time he was done talking to them he was as exasperated as they.

The old farmer inquired about the progress at the well and Bill told him in a few words. "Doesn't look too good, does she?" the farmer echoed the sentiments of everyone at the well. Bill just thanked him for the phone and left.

It seemed as if the trucks had been standing by just for Bill's call, so quickly did they arrive with their loads. Bill heaved a sigh of relief. He felt as if he had been fighting everyone with only grit and will to go on, and now he had won. The roughnecks mixed the mud in dirt pits to the right viscosity--giving the mud its college education--and laid the big circulating hose in. They were ready to roll the kelly and make hole again. Bill watched the driller note D. D. in the log, for "drilling deeper." Then the kelly gained speed until the vibrations were heavy and regular again; it was a good feeling after they had been absent so long. The floor of the doghouse pulsed pleasingly as Bill stood and watched the mud gauge that told him the mud was holding solid in its task of providing a casing for circulation of water and drill cutting, and holding back outside materials from the drill pipe and bit.

Bill felt he should be able to sleep now. It would be about thirty feet to Arbuckle and everything seemed to be going all right. But still a fervent feeling held him on

tense tiptoe, and he stayed watching the probing kelly, fascinated as it pushed the drill bit closer and closer to . . . "That was a close call," Bill thought. "Would have been the end of the well, probably, but we got by it. No need to feel like this now."

There was not much use going back to the trailer. Although Link, in the doghouse, wasn't at all talkative now, he was better company than Grant. He knew by now that Grant would have his briefs and cases packed, waiting to pull out. He wanted to hurry so he wouldn't louse on a well in Columbus County that he was trying to sit on at the same time. "Well, let him," Bill thought. "I can look at samples, and he's got nothing more to go on than I have from here on down. No logs from other wells--not even hope," thought Bill wryly.

As Bill stood in the door of the doghouse his eyes seldom left the mud guage. That was why he was the first to notice a gradual, but sure, drop in the pressure. He had a crazy impulse to keep it to himself so they could drill even another inch before it was noticed, but he felt it was only temporary, and nudged Link. Link was at the lever in a second and eased the pressure and the mud gauge climbed to normal once more. "Whew!" thought Bill. "Guess it <u>was</u> only temporary." Link found out they weren't losing mud, they only seemed to be getting too little down. The trouble was soon corrected and the pulleys again made their swoop toward the drilling

table.

And while Bill watched as they started to get back on the bottom of the hole, all hell cut loose--in the well and himself. The mud guage, which had been steady as they squared away to go back down, dropped to zero as if there had never been anything to hold it up. In just a few seconds there was a gurgling, sucking noise as the cavity they had struck drained the mud pits and the hungry vacuum begged for more. "Lost her ass!" came the cry. "Hump up there!" Pandemonium broke loose among the crew as each rushed to do his part in getting out of the hole. A reckless roughneck whirled away up to the double board, and Link began to apply power to pull the 3,550-foot string of pipe out of the hole and stack the mararoni on the finger board. The rig and motor and floor of the doghouse vibrated and jumped with the effort of pulling out a bit that was buried and jammed in sloughing structures.

But Bill didn't feel the jumping of the floor of the doghouse, because he was halfway to the old man's Chevy, stumbling because he was carrying a weight that was suffocating him and deadening his brain and threatening to pull him down.

Sandy Grant was just closing the door of his car. He raised a pitying hand to Bill and drove away. Bill followed a little while later and Grant's dust was hanging in the air because it was so early in the morning. It was not quite sun-up, and the air was crisp and still and good to breath. The

sun sent rosy beams of promise over the horizon and shining into an old Chevy at a young man with an ancient look driving down a lonely country road.

And after Bill had cleaned up, shaved, and eaten his first good meal for a week he felt better. Not good, just yet, But better.

X. LIE DOWN WITH THE LAMB

When the battered Dodge caravan pulled into the yard that April morning, Erick Hanford reflected it must be a peddler, but it was with a note of anticipation that he went to see. Didn't get many outfits that looked like that--or much traffic, for that matter, on this out-of-the-way road. But it wasn't a peddler, though it might have been from his appearance. Not much out of the ordinary, the man was tired-looking and thin. About thirty-six, Erick guessed. He was direct in what he had to say.

"You're Erick Hanford?" he had asked.

"Yes."

"Your neighbor west told me this was where you lived. I'm Ford Raines." They shook hands. "There is some sandy bottom ground in timber next to the creek. I understand it belongs to you."

"That's right," replied Erick. "That's on my northwest quarter."

"I'd like to camp there, if you're not planning to use the ground."

"Well, it's useless to me as farmland," Erick replied, curious. He had never had such a request before. The man certainly didn't look like a gypsy. "How long would you want to stay?"

"I don't know," the man had said slowly. "I need to

plant some sweet potatoes and watermelon." He added, "I'll give you what you can use. If you want some of that timber cleared, I will do that." He looked straight at Erick and did not ask but instead stated, as if when the other man understood what he wanted, granting it was the natural thing one human would do for another. "I have no money and I'll bother no one. I'm alone," he added, as an afterthought.

The man continued to look straight at Erick, and Erick didn't say he should ask Elsie, or ask how he had found this place, why he wanted to do this, where he had come from, or a dozen other questions he wanted to ask. "All right," Erick had said, and the man said "Thank you" very simply and climbed into his caravan.

Ford Raines didn't keep a strict schedule, particularly in the summer when there was work to do in his garden, or fruit or grain that could be harvested from the land nearby. He usually did that earlier in the day when it was cool. Then in the afternoon he could grind corn, wash and mend his clothes, or have a pipe in the coolness of the shade trees. This morning, however, a low, blue scarf of clouds from the east was folded halfway over the sky and the unmistakable fall-hint in the air made this day somehow different. Still, after a couple of deep and savoring breaths Ford routinely went to the vine-covered clearing between some nearby trees and selected three watermelons and a half-dozen canaloupe. Tying them in a sack,

he hoisted them to his head and walked the half-mile to the country road. On a bench at the side of the road he lay them out and rested. He tested the two melons and three cantaloupes lying there from yesterday; one of the melons and two of the cantaloupes were getting overripe, and he put them into the sack. Paying little attention to its jingling contents, he emptied a rusty tin can into his overalls pockets.

With the sack now over his shoulder, he looked at the sky for a moment. It was rarely that a rain came from the east this time of year. Usually brought a long, slow drizzle when it did come. Might have to have a fire--it had been cool already last night. Could spend today inside--he enjoyed the warm closeness when there was bad weather outside. Ford recalled the days when he was a boy; sometimes even Larry seemed to enjoy "puttering" inside with him when the days were nasty and his brother couldn't adventure. Ford made special plans to do things that his brother would think were interesting. "What's that," Larry would ask, pretending boredom with it already, superior although hardly a year older.

And Ford would earnestly explain, "That's setting solution. We could develop some pictures," or, "Hydrochloric acid. It's powerful stuff. Look at all the things it will eat up," wanting his brother, who was more interested in making money with his paper route (or trading, or acting out bets and dares), to think that what he was doing was all right. Hydrochloric

acid. It was that afternoon with his brother that they had dropped a piece of limestone into a bowl of hydrocholoric acid and had seen it flake away in the corrosive, foaming action. His brother had been fascinated with the things Ford knew from books, for a little while, and when the evening was clear he had said, "Whyncha come with me down by the tracks?" He had gone with him while Larry, thirteen years old, played pool for a dime kicker. Ford had tried to act tough and knowing like his brother, but he didn't like it, and had slipped away and ran home.

What was worse, when Larry had slipped in after eleven o'clock, he caught Ford reading a book about a doctor. He had laughed suddenly and bleatingly at him and had gone to bed without saying a word. "'At would be a good racket," he had said once when Ford had mentioned being a doctor. "They can really pull in the dough." Ford, hesitatingly but feeling it important that he not be misunderstood, had said something about being able to help people. "Horse cock," Larry had said. Enjoying how it shocked Ford, he repeated, "Horse cock. What a kid! Boy, you don't know what the score is before the game starts." Ford had stammered some thoughts, mostly remembered from books, wanting some sort of recognition from his brother that his ideas weren't childish--he knew they weren't. "Wait 'til you've grown up, kid. You'll change your tune," Larry had said condescendingly.

"Well, he was right about one thing, anyway," thought Ford, scooping out the seeds of the cantaloupe with his fingers. He broke the halves in pieces so that he could eat them without a fork and dropped the shells in a pit beside the trailer. "I'm not a doctor." But at least the idea hadn't changed, as he was able to tell Larry more clearly later.

He was working on the newspaper then, where his ability to take and develop pictures had landed him the job. "Yeah, I'd like to do something to help people. Not that there's anything wrong with having an extra buck or two," he'd said to Larry once, "But why chase it like you do--like a dog-and-bitch? You don't want for anything, but every day you run a race to make more than the day before. Always a new scheme. Then you worry that you'll make a profit with what you have. It pushes everything else out of your life . . . you're not giving anything of yourself--there's not even a <u>self</u> left!" Perhaps he'd been a little passionate himself in his speech. Larry had seemed uncomfortable, and was embarrassed when Ford had put his hand on his brother whom he'd never reached and who was always farther away. "You lack a purpose, Larry. You're missing life," was all he was able to say to bridge the gap.

Larry had been a little angry. "I <u>have</u> a purpose, and you can name it, at least. You're the one who don't! Where'n the hell would we be if it weren't for the people who push and

do things--build and buy and sell? I read some of the stuff you write--though I'm surprised old Frothy lets it get in the paper. Wantin' city housing, hand-outs for the poor. You're idealistic as you ever were." Regaining his status as an older brother, Larry had even felt a little sorry for Ford. "You've got a good head on your shoulders. For God's sake, be a little practical!" he had finished.

He had been able to talk more freely with Larry after that, but they once again avoided that line of thought. Got too close to the quick, he guessed. Ford felt the helpless surge that was old now, of brother loving but not understanding brother. Couldn't preach to him--and what was there to say that made it sound sensible . . . his feeling that encounters among people should only be in a "natural" way? That cut out sharp business deals.

Ford had cut the melon he had brought back from the roadstand into long quarters. Now he sliced it carefully into inch-wide strips. The clouds were a little broken now, and the rain was receding in the east. Just a little sun would be enough to get these started today, he thought to himself. He spread the seed-stripped slices on some rough planks and hung mesh over them; already five draped shapes like this hunched like wet, rain-coated soldiers in the mist. Ought to be three sacks-full dried or drying by now, he thought, straightening up with his hands on the small of his back. "Larry was right

another way, too," he mused. Old Frothy--or rather "Editor Forthman," as he always introduced himself--didn't use a lot of his stuff. "See here, Raines, this share-the-wealth stuff! Are you inclined to the left?" he'd often say, and once Ford and replied, "No, I'm just for the right." Frothy had snorted, after an uppercut look at him, "Anyhow, you take a good picture. Why'n cha stick to that?" and dismissed him by throwing another story in the trash can. Four years he'd been there. Interesting how everything then he still remembered by associating it with time when time meant so little now. Third year was when Julie came. Julie he could talk to. He'd told her first about his idea for inexpensive printing by taking a picture of a whole page layout and developing it on a flexible sheet for direct printing . . . she had wanted to know what was wrong with the old way, but sensing his enthusiasm had urged him to try it. The oilstained old printer had actually become angry, and Frothy had laughed aloud--another Raines venture into dreamland.

But Julie . . . he remembered mostly how she walked with her rear tucked in so that everything followed her flat abdomen as she swayed forward. "Looks like an Aztec maiden blissfully walking foreward to sacrifice herself to the God of Phallism," one of the chasers who worked in the ad department with her had said. Remembered her sweetness, too, and now he tried to forget the unbelief that after a year of lov-

ing him she had been able to talk about how "it hurt her that there was no future for them" . . . "You're made for higher things; your brand of ideas are necessary but . . . out of step." She had tried to make it easier by making herself sound weak. "I guess I need something down-to-earth . . . too many every-day needs." She had married a Buick salesman who took her on a month-long honeymoon to California.

Ford knocked his pipe against the palm of his hand. "Almost like the dock better," he said to himself, and broke his chain of thought. Mixing some of the tobacco he had left with a handful of dried curl-dock, he punched it into his pipe. A light breeze had come up to take the sultry dampness from the air, and he loosened the shutter inside the trailer. As the window swung in and out, it pulled hard leather fingers back and forth across an auto-harp mounted on the wall of the caravan. A halting, sighing melody much like the motion of the drifting and eddying smoke played around him.

Larry had written from Western Kansas:

> . . . there is a business for sale here that is a great opportunity. The only drug store in town that does any business is going to sell. Times are hard just now after four dry years hurting the farmers, and they are selling out for as little as six dollars an acre. With no business from the farmers, the stores are hurting. Though the crops are better this year, nobody here has any ready cash. I'm buying all I can, and I think of this drug store as a sound investment for both of us. Guess I should be convinced things are going to happen--I'm one of a Lucky Seven

oil partnership, and we're going to drill a well near here soon. You ought to . . .

Yes, as an investment, guess the drug store had been sound. "Wonder how much it being a drug store had to do with my going," he chuckled, remembering his boyhood dreams. Just circumstance--ready to chuck the newspaper and St. Louis. And Larry surely thought he was ready to try the business rather than the "dream" world.

"Spending a lot of time remembering today," Ford thought, watching the September sun scud through its indigo bank. "Guess it's time for taking stock all the way around," he reasoned, his mind flitting over his winter store of dug-outs nearly filled with sweet potatoes and dried corn he had laid away--little enough of the corn. Corn meal to finish up yet. Had two five-gallon tins of cooking grease . . . dried currents, grapes, and plums; watermelon drying to its sweet toughness. Wonder how that dried spinich will be--maybe should have tried a little more. Lamb's quarter had been fine in soup last winter.

It had been winter when Larry's well was finally finished--though what they found earlier had been encouraging enough. A snowy, wind-biting day before Christmas hadn't kept the cars away. Seven hundred, somebody said. It had excited him, too; or maybe it was the milling, expectant and awed hundreds of people, each infecting the other. And when the bailer had come up full of oil and dumped out its load after

pungent load, for a moment they all felt as if they shared in the joyousness of a powerful moment.

"Daid's struck ile," the Oklahoma driller had shouted, and the crowd had borrowed the stranger's phrase and threw it warmly against the bitter wind. Even the women in fur collar and cuffs crowded forward and ritual-like dipped their fingers. Larry had quickly become a little drunk, and wanted them to "drill her a little deeper, maybe she'll come outa the top!" In the laughing and back-pounding even among the unaffected, stolid men were unashamedly out of character in their exuberance. "How about your money-man brother now?" Larry had draped his arm around Ford and handed him a fifth of bonded bourbon from the drugstore stocks, and Ford had laughed at himself with his brother. Guess that was a happy day--it was the right way, too: man outguessing nature instead of fighting himself.

But the later bidding against one another, the tactics to out-maneuver and drill by and the bickering rawness of the boom--these were what saddened him as he watched Larry make himself harder and sharper to compete. So a couple of years had gone--he giving too much credit to customers and Larry playing the part of the two-fisted, prosperous oil man. Ford felt vaguely dissatisfied at the time, but in everybody's opinion he was doing well. Even with the tension and lack of purpose he began to accept that, just as people began to accept

him as the businessman he was on the surface. Maybe really was. "But Larry was never quite able to talk me into the oil game, though," he remembered half-proud.

With a piece of string Ford was measuring the length of a wind propeller set up beside the trailer. Reflecting, he paid out enough string to make it nearly half again as long and cut it. Then he did the same thing with the width of the propeller, using a twig for measure. The proportion of length to width he had carefully experimented to find, and it pleased him to be following a rule of his own making. He picked up a hatchet and walked to an ash grove. "Not that the rig I have now doesn't do the job," he told himself. "But a bigger one might be better. I'll get enough for a four-blader and see if that wouldn't do better." He remembered the first time he had transferred windpower along the first crude shaft through the hand-carved eccentric and had mechanically ground his corn meal. Next had been that sloshing washing machine made from an old ten-gallon drum.

Feeling the heavy bole he had just hacked down, he savored the anticipation that he felt toward the winter days when he would slowly work it into something graceful to fly in the wind. A timid, warmer breeze fingered the long hair at the back of Ford's neck. In the dappled leafage a sparrow chattered at another nearby, and a red squirrel ran silently down the limb of a huge old cottonwood and then stopped

perfectly motionless, though in plain sight, to look at him. With his back against the tree, Ford was meticulously trimming off the first-year shoots of flexible greenness, using the sharp hatchet head like a knife. His rough hands caressed the rough wood as he looked for a fault in the grain or a deep eye that would make the piece useless.

It was just an interesting problem to be solved when Larry had talked to him first of the trouble they had in keeping some of the wells producing. Those in sand pays were all right, but the limestone zones held the oil too close and their production was dying fast. "Ordinarily we shoot them with nitro," Larry said. "Breaks up the rock, gives cracks for the oil to flow through--but it doesn't always work. Sometimes just clogs up." He spoke as if such wells were useless; more's the pity they had to be abandoned since the oil was there. "Man that figures a way to ream the hole bigger will get rich," Larry kidded his brother.

Scarcely hearing the last sentence, Ford was visualizing the porous limestone thousands of feet below, saturated with oil that would only seep out slowly. Farmers hand-dug wells to get a wider drainage area and make a trickle of water a usable stream. Larry was right--ream the hole , make it bigger. Impossibly expensive to drill a bigger hole, though. The explosion probably made a cavern, all right, but he could see how it might pack the rock even tighter. And

then Ford, looking across the counter at his brother, remembered suddenly a thirteen-year-old who was for a little while interested watching limestone sputtering and dissolving in a bowl of hydrochloric acid.

A little experimentation in the shed next to the drug store had determined a workable solution and showed that pouring the acid directly into the paraffined casing would get it down to the zone. It had been Larry who suggested that gas pressure from a nearby well might be used to force it into the pay zone when necessary. About three barrels they had poured the first day into Larry's North Shady No. 1. The following day when the crew swabbed out the oil and acid, the well had doubled from its half-a-barrel an hour production.

Encouraged enough by this to order enough acid to make twenty more barrels of the solution, Larry had begged Ford to hire a patent attorney. "Just find out if it's possible to patent . . . just protect yourself in case," he had argued. They finally had the dud well producing 200 barrels a day, and the news brought dozens of spectators to the wells they were treating. There were swarms of bold questions about the process. "Tell 'em nothin'," Larry said. Larry himself had called the process completely Ford's, and Ford soon had enough wells to treat that he invested in some equipment, stocked nearly $2,000 worth of acid, bought a truck, and kept a crew. They were so busy for a couple of weeks that Freddie, who had

been an unobtrusive clerk, had done nothing but help mix the solution. Then he disappeared. "Is that all there is to it, Mr. Raines?" he remembered Freddie asking. Then Freddie was Mr. Wiley, consultant to the Soward Chemical Company, and that company had a patent pending, a court stop order, and a personal warrant.

"Fight them," Larry said. "They're just bluffing. They know your idea could be worth millions or they wouldn't try this."

"What's the use, Larry?" Ford had said, feeling very tired. For it had been exciting, building an idea that everyone accepted. "I was just interested in getting oil from the ground, not fighting other companies." His raped sense of right allowed him only a hollow sort of rage and unbelief.

The patent attorney had shouted when he talked on the phone. "Yes, I started the patent through. Some more information is needed before it can be started again, however. I got the application back, uh, a couple of days ago. Now you'll need to tell me . . ."

Interrupting him, Ford told him of Soward's claim. "Will my patent be accepted, since the application was first?"

"Barely possible, since their application has been accepted . . . as I understand. If you wanted to fight it, I'll be glad to represent your case . . ."

Near bankruptcy, Ford had felt resigned, as if he had

just learned an impossible truth. Larry had been frantic, and then his company's newest well had lost its bit in a cavy formation. Though he never had to involve himself, Larry was angry, tense with the urgency of the moment when he came back to town personally for a devil's claw to fish the lost bit. Quietly taking inventory, Ford had heard Larry's pounding steps when he had stopped by the store to get some whiskey. Neither spoke, except for Larry's "That damn Jackson on No. 4 lost his tools." Perhaps he felt as awkwardly naked showing his impotent anger as Ford was at seeing it openly displayed.

Ford was finishing inventory, late that night, when mild James Stanton, one of the Lucky Seven partners, rapped at the window. He let the little man in, and Stanton blinked at the light.

"Can I do something for you, Mr. Stanton?" he asked.

Stanton's voice was quiet, but he remembered it as booming out in the quiet night. "It's your brother, Ford. There's been an accident."

When Ford pushed his way through the crowd around the pickup truck at the hotel, he heard someone shout excitedly to his neighbor, ". . . fell into the calf wheel sprockets. Guess it tore his haid off clean!"

"Have to find something to eat pretty soon," Ford thought, and felt the pleasure that comes with hunger when the easy and immediate means to satisfy it exists. He had

just finished leisurely and carefully trimming up the fourth length of wood, and now he dropped it beside the others on the level beside the trailer. Then he saw that Erick was walking across the field again from where he left his car, swinging his empty hands. Erick and the curious others had shown they finally understood when they stopped bringing him newspapers and other articles they considered necessities. Now Ford saw Erick only when the farmer wanted to relax and talk quietly and peacefully. Ford poured cornbread batter from yesterday and put it in the small oven with a sweet potato to bake while he talked. Then he poked around in his pipe, flicked out the spent ashes, and added a little more of the blackened leaf.

He had found a seat with a fine back rest and his pipe was drawing well by the time Erick came and sat beside him in the warm, fall-slanting sun.

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